

## **Little Gain for Bush's Tax Cut; Job Rating is Positive, but Subpar**

George W. Bush's sales pitch hasn't produced many new takers for his tax cut. Three-quarters of Americans have higher priorities for federal spending, and sizable numbers express doubt about both the size and fairness of his proposal.

Twenty-two percent of Americans give top priority to a tax cut, and that is up a bit since last fall. But 77 percent still cite other priorities: strengthening Social Security, reducing the debt or spending more on programs such as education and health care.

While Bush has suggested all these are possible, the public divides on whether his plan leaves enough money to meet other needs. Nearly half also think his proposal favors the wealthy - a view that quite closely reflects public response to both the 1981 Reagan tax cut and the tax cut proposed by congressional Republicans a year and a half ago.

	Tax plan favors the:			
	Wealthy	Middle class	Poor	Treats all equally
Feb. '01	47%	8	4	33
Aug. '99	49	14	6	23
Apr. '81	48	14	5	27

Given these views, this poll finds that if taxes are to be cut, 53 percent of Americans prefer a smaller, more targeted approach, rather than Bush's across-the-board plan. The tax cut will be a centerpiece of the budget he presents to Congress on Tuesday, the first budget plan of his new administration.

**APPROVAL** - More broadly, Bush begins his presidency with a positive job approval rating, but one that's lower than usual for a new administration in its honeymoon period. Indeed his rating is the lowest at a comparable point in polls dating to Eisenhower.

Fifty-five percent of Americans approve of the way Bush is handling his job, compared to a previous low of 60 percent for Richard Nixon in late February 1969. The best was 76 percent for Bush's father at this point in 1989; the average is 67 percent.

Early Presidential Approval Ratings		
Bush	55%	Feb. 25, 2001
Clinton	63	Feb. 23, 1993
Bush	76	Feb. 14, 1989
Reagan	68	Feb. 20, 1981
Carter*	71	Feb. 21, 1977
Nixon	60	Feb. 25, 1969

Kennedy	72	Feb. 15, 1961
Eisenhower	67	Late Feb. 1953
Average	67	

\*Carter and previous by Gallup

This table leaves out the three postwar presidents who took over in mid-stream after their predecessors died or resigned - Truman, Johnson and Ford. Their approval ratings after their first month, for the record, were 87, 74 and 66 percent, respectively.

While Bush's rating is lower than usual for a new president, it's fair to note that his predecessors didn't come to office under nearly as controversial terms. For perspective, Bush's current rating is a tad under the full-career averages maintained by Clinton, Reagan and Johnson - all in the midrange of postwar presidents.

BEG YOUR PARDON - As to Clinton, this poll does not find broad public outrage over his widely criticized pardons. Just more than a third, 35 percent, call this a "very important issue," though another three in 10 call it "somewhat important."

The public divides evenly on whether the pardons warrant further congressional hearings, or a criminal investigation to see whether Clinton broke the law.

On the pardon:	Yes	No
Further Congressional hearings?	46%	50
Criminal investigation?	46	50

The pardon issue may have knocked a little fizz out of Clinton's retrospective job approval rating. Fifty-nine percent approve of the way he handled his job in office, down from 65 percent just before he left office last month. That 65 percent was the highest end-of-career rating of any postwar president.

GROUPS - Naturally, these views are quite partisan. Among people who approve of Clinton's job performance, seven in 10 oppose either further congressional investigations or a criminal investigation. Among those who disapprove of Clinton's work in office, about eight in 10 support these investigations.

Bush's approval rating is also quite partisan. Among Republicans, 86 percent approve of the new president's performance to date; among Democrats, just 37 percent approve. Among independents, 54 percent approve.

There's also a very large gender gap in views of Bush's performance: Sixty-three percent of men approve, compared to just 49 percent of women. In the election itself, men were more apt than women to support Bush by a 10-point margin.

The gender gap extends to spending priorities. Men are more fiscally oriented; they're 16 points more likely than women to give top priority to a tax cut, and nine points more apt to prefer debt reduction. Women, by contrast, are 19 points more likely than men to give priority to funding domestic programs.

Top priority:	All	Men	Women
Tax cut	22%	30	14
Debt reduction	17	22	13
Social Security	25	22	28
Domestic programs	35	25	44

**METHODOLOGY** - This ABC News/Washington Post poll was conducted by telephone Feb. 21-25, 2001, among a random national sample of 1,050 adults. The results have a three-point error margin. Fieldwork by TNS Intersearch of Horsham, Pa.

Analysis by Gary Langer.

ABC News polls can be found at ABCNEWS.com on the Internet, at:  
<http://abcnews.go.com/sections/politics/PollVault/PollVault.html>

Here are the full results:

\*= less than 0.5 percent

1. Do you approve or disapprove of the way George W. Bush is handling his job as president?

	Approve	Disapprove	No opinion
2/25/01	55	23	22

Compare to:

Clinton 2/23/93	63	30	7
Bush 2/14/89	76	14	10
Reagan 2/20/81	68	15	17
Carter 2/21/77*	71	9	20
Nixon 2/25/69	60	6	34
Kennedy 2/15/61	72	6	22
Eisenhower Late 2/53	67	8	25

For Comparison:

Truman 5/45-6/45	87	3	10	FDR Died 4/12/45
Johnson 12/17/63	74	4	22	Kennedy assassinated 11/22/63
Ford 9/9/74	66	13	21	Nixon resigned 8/9/74

\*Carter and previous: Gallup polls

2. Which of these do you think should be the top priority for any surplus money in the federal budget - cut federal income taxes, put it toward reducing the national debt, strengthen the Social Security system, or increase spending on other domestic programs such as education or health care?

	Cut taxes	Reduce debt	Soc. Sec.	Dom. Progs.	No opin.
2/25/01	22	17	25	35	1
9/6/00 RV	14	19	36	29	1
8/27/00	16	13	29	40	2

7/23/00	15	19	32	33	2
7/23/00 RV	15	20	32	30	2
9/2/99	14	19	29	37	1

3. Which of these would you prefer: (A large tax-cut plan that provides an across-the-board tax cut for everyone), or (A smaller tax cut plan that provides targeted tax cuts mainly for lower and middle-income people)?

	Large cut	Smaller cut	No opinion
2/25/01	43	53	4
1/15/01	47	51	2
10/9/00 RV	48	48	4
9/6/00 RV	45	53	2

4. As you may know, Bush has proposed cutting taxes by one-point-six trillion dollars over 10 years. Do you think this tax cut would or would not leave enough money to keep the federal budget balanced and provide enough money for programs such as Social Security, education and health care?

	Would	Would not	No opinion
2/25/01	40	42	18

5. Do you think the tax cut Bush has proposed would mainly benefit lower income people, middle income people, upper income people, or all people about equally?

	Lower	Middle	Upper	All equally	No opin.
2/25/01	4	8	47	33	8
For comparison:					
8/1/99	6	14	49	23	7
4/22/81	5	14	48	27	6
3/29/81	6	17	47	26	5
2/20/81	7	15	43	31	4

8/99: As you may know, the Republicans in Congress have called for a 792 billion dollar tax cut over the next 10 years. Who do you think would benefit most from such a tax cut: poor and lower income people, middle income people, upper income people, or do you think all people would benefit pretty much equally?

4/81 and previous: Reagan called for a 30 percent federal income tax reduction for all taxpayers over the next three years. Who do you think would benefit most from such a tax cut: poor and lower income people, middle income people, upper income people, or do you think all people would benefit pretty much equally?

6. On another subject, do you approve or disapprove of the way Bill Clinton handled his job as president?

	-----Approve-----			-----Disapprove-----			No op.
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	
2/25/01	59	NA	NA	37	NA	NA	4
1/15/01*	65	36	29	32	10	22	3
8/20/00**	60	33	27	35	12	23	5
5/14/00	57	NA	NA	40	NA	NA	3
2/27/00	62	32	31	35	12	23	3
2/6/00	61	32	29	36	11	25	3
1/26/00	58	NA	NA	38	NA	NA	3
10/31/99	59	NA	NA	38	NA	NA	3
9/2/99	58	28	30	38	13	25	4
6/6/99	58	30	28	38	12	26	4
4/26/99	60	NA	NA	37	NA	NA	3
3/14/99	64	38	26	34	9	25	3
2/14/99	68	46	22	30	7	23	2
2/12/99	67	NA	NA	31	NA	NA	2

Call for full trend

\*1/15/01 "has handled"  
\*\*8/20/00 and previous: "is handling"

7. Thinking about the pardons Clinton granted just before he left office, do you think this is a very important issue, somewhat important, not too important or not important at all?

	-----Important-----			-----Not important-----			No
	NET	Very	Somewhat	NET	Not too	Not at all	op.
2/25/01	64	35	30	32	15	16	4

8. Do you think Congress should or should not hold further hearings into how and why Clinton granted these pardons?

	Should	Should not	No opinion
2/25/01	46	50	4

9. Do you think there should or should not be a criminal investigation into whether Clinton broke any laws in granting these pardons?

	Should	Should not	No opinion
2/25/01	46	50	4

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