

ABC NEWS/WASHINGTON POST POLL: GOVERNMENT - 1/27/02

EMBARGO: 6:30 P.M. BROADCAST, 8 P.M. PRINT/WEB, Wednesday, Feb. 6, 2002

Some Basic Views of Gov't Unchanged; Lower Demand for Action on Many Issues

Americans' basic views on the size and role of government haven't changed much since Sept. 11: More prefer a smaller government to a larger one, although most continue to give a higher priority to providing "needed services."

More Americans do express optimism in the post-Sept. 11 world that government can solve problems - especially security problems, but also economic and even domestic ones. At the same time, public demand for action on many domestic issues has declined.

Some results in this ABC News/Washington Post poll run counter to the notion that the public's basic views of government have been altered since the terrorist attacks. Previous ABC News polling has suggested that what's mainly changed is the public's context for evaluating government, rather than its fundamental views of government.

In this poll, 64 percent say "providing needed services" is more important than "holding down the size of government" - almost exactly the same as last summer, unchanged by the events of 9/11.

There is some movement, but not sweeping change, in another question: Fifty-four percent prefer "smaller government with fewer services," down five points since July 2000, while 41 percent prefer "larger government with many services," up seven points.

	Holding down the size of gov't	Providing needed services
Now 7/01	33%	64
	33	63
	Smaller gov't w/fewer services	Larger gov't w/many services
Now 7/00	54%	41
	59	34

Sept. 11 seems to have brought home to many people that the "services" the government provides include, crucially, protection from terrorism. In an ABC News poll last month, 68 percent said they trust the government to handle national security; just 38 percent said they trust it to handle social issues.

OPTIMISM - Nonetheless, events since Sept. 11 do seem to have inspired newfound optimism. In this poll, confidence in the government's ability to solve problems in general has risen, to 66 percent, from 51 percent in 2000.

Such confidence is greatest - 78 percent - when it comes to handling national security problems. Confidence in the government's ability to handle economic problems drops to 63 percent; and on domestic problems it's 58 percent - a majority, but 20 points lower than confidence specifically on security matters.

	Confidence in government	
	Yes	No
To solve "a problem"	66%	34
To solve national security problems	78	22
To solve economic problems	63	37
To solve domestic problems	58	42

WASTE - Similarly, this poll finds much less skepticism about governmental waste in military spending, while perceptions of waste in domestic spending haven't changed.

Today a minority of Americans, 43 percent, say there's a "great deal" of waste in military spending, down 20 points from an ABC News poll taken in 1983. But 61 percent see a great deal of waste in domestic spending, and, again, that's essentially unchanged.

	Think there's a "great deal" of waste	
Military spending		
Now	43%	
8/83	63	
Domestic spending		
Now	61	
8/83	58	

PRIORITIES - The campaign against terrorism and the economy have moved to the top of the public's priority list in the aftermath of Sept. 11. At the same time, demand for action on a number of social issues has diminished.

The number of Americans who say a balanced budget should be a top priority for Bush and the Congress has dropped by 14 points from its pre-9/11 level. Top priority for environmental issues has lost 12 points; for prescription drug benefits for the elderly, down 10 points; education, down eight points.

	Highest priority for Bush and Congress		
	Now	4/01	Diff.
Campaign against terrorism	46%	na	na
Economy	45	44	+ 1
Education	38	46	- 8
Social Security	33	39	- 6
Health care	32	na	na
National defense	31	na	na
Prescription drugs	27	37	-10
Keeping budget balanced	21	35*	-14
Environment	17	29	-12

Campaign finance	14	15	- 1
*1/01			

PARTISANSHIP - As usual, Republicans are much more supportive of a smaller, less activist government. At the same time, they also express more confidence in the government's ability to solve problems. That's likely due to their overwhelming confidence in George W. Bush, whom they give a 98 percent job approval rating.

	Dem	Rep	Ind
Confidence in gov't:			
To solve "a problem"	64%	72	62
To solve economic problems	59	71	61
To solve national security problems	73	88	73
To solve domestic problems	55	67	50
More important:			
Holding down size of gov't	19	50	28
Providing needed services	78	48	68
Prefer:			
Smaller gov't, fewer services	48	62	54
Larger gov't, many services	48	33	43

WORK - Finally, whatever admiration for government does exist, most people would rather work in the private sector. Assuming equal pay and benefits, 59 percent of Americans say they'd prefer to work for a private company, while 34 percent pick the federal government.

Majorities of all demographic groups would chose to work for a private company over the government. The same is true of partisanship; about six in 10 Democrats, Republicans and independents alike would sooner take a private job.

METHODOLOGY - This ABC News/Washington Post poll was conducted by telephone January 24-27, 2002, among a random national sample of 1,507 adults. The results have a 2.5-point error margin. Fieldwork by TNS Intersearch of Horsham, Pa.

Analysis by Gary Langer and Daniel Merkle.

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

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Here are the full results (*=less than 0.5 percent):

38. On another subject, would you rather have a good job (working for the federal government), or a good job, with the same pay and benefits, (working for a private company)?

Federal	Private	No
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	gov't.	company	opin.
1/27/02	34	59	7

39. When the government in Washington decides to solve a problem, how much confidence do you have that the problem actually will be solved: A lot, some, just a little, or none at all?

	-----Confidence-----			-----Little/No Confidence-----			No opin.
	NET	A lot	Some	NET	Just a little	None at all	
1/27/02	66	14	52	34	27	7	1
6/25/00*	51	8	43	48	35	13	1
12/4/95**	39	4	35	61	38	23	*
5/15/94	36	4	31	64	42	22	*
1/23/94	43	4	39	56	40	16	1
2/28/93	51	5	46	49	37	12	*
4/9/92	50	4	46	50	38	12	1
10/29/91	37	7	31	62	38	23	1

*NPR/Kaiser/Harvard

**Kaiser/Harvard/Washington Post

40. When the government in Washington decides to solve (READ ITEM), how much confidence do you have that the problem actually will be solved: A lot, some, just a little, or none at all?

1/27/02

	---Confidence---			Little/No Confidence			No opin.
	NET	A lot	Some	NET	Little	None	
a. economic problems	63	11	52	37	31	6	*
b. national security problems	78	27	51	22	18	4	*
c. domestic problems like (health care), (education) and (Social Security)	58	12	46	42	33	9	*

41. How much waste would you say there is in military spending by the United States government: a great deal, some, not very much, or none at all?

	----Much Waste----			----Not Much Waste----			No opin.
	NET	Great deal	Some	NET	Not very much	None at all	
1/27/02	83	43	41	13	10	3	4
8/1/83*	91	63	28	7	6	1	2

*How much waste would you say there is in military spending: a great deal..."

42. How much waste would you say there is in domestic spending by the United States government: a great deal, some, not very much, or none at all?

	----Much Waste----			----Not Much Waste----			No opin.
	NET	Great deal	Some	NET	Not very much	None at all	
1/27/02	93	61	32	6	5	1	1
8/1/83	89	58	31	8	7	1	2

43. Which of these is more important to you: (holding down the size of government) or (providing needed services)?

	Holding down size of govt	Providing needed svcs	Both (vol.)	No opin.
1/27/02	33	64	1	2
7/30/01	33	63	3	1
4/22/01	31	62	5	2
10/18/00 LV	30	58	10	1

44. Would you say you favor (smaller government with fewer services), or (larger government with many services)?

	Smaller govt. fewer services	Larger govt. many services	No opinion
1/27/02	54	41	5
10/9/00 RV	58	32	10
10/1/00 RV	58	33	9
7/23/00	59	34	7
7/23/00 RV	61	32	7
4/2/00	56	38	7
8/16/98	59	35	6
8/5/96	63	32	5
7/8/92	55	38	7

END