

# AEI Political Report

## Obama's Start

Barack Obama has enjoyed more good will thus far than any recent president-elect. His historic election combined with his solid margin of victory has produced a rally-to-the-flag effect for the president-elect. Americans want him to succeed. And so far, he has not disappointed them. Solid majorities approve of the job he is doing handling his presidential transition and his cabinet appointments. When he takes office, Americans believe he will confront bigger challenges than his predecessors. Three-quarters of Democrats, 58 percent of independents, and 31 percent of Republicans say they have a good idea where he wants to take the country.

Q: Do you . . . ?

	Approve of the job he is doing handling his presidential transition	Disapprove
Bill Clinton (Dec. 1992)	67%	15%
George W. Bush (Jan. 2001)	65	26
Barack Obama (Dec. 2008)	75	17

Note: In a mid-December CNN/Opinion Research Corporation poll, 82 percent approved of the way Obama was handling his presidential transition.

Source: Gallup/USA Today.

Q: Are you . . . ?

	Obama Dec. 2008	G. W. Bush Jan. 2001	Clinton Jan. 1993
Generally pleased with the people _____ has appointed to posts in the administration	67%	54%	54%
Generally disappointed	16	17	14
Mixed (vol.)	7	18	12
Not sure	10	11	20

Source: NBC News/Wall Street Journal.

Q: Do you think that . . . ?

When Barack Obama takes office he will be facing bigger challenges than most presidents have	77%
About the same	19
Smaller challenges	4

Source: NBC News/Wall Street Journal, December 2008.

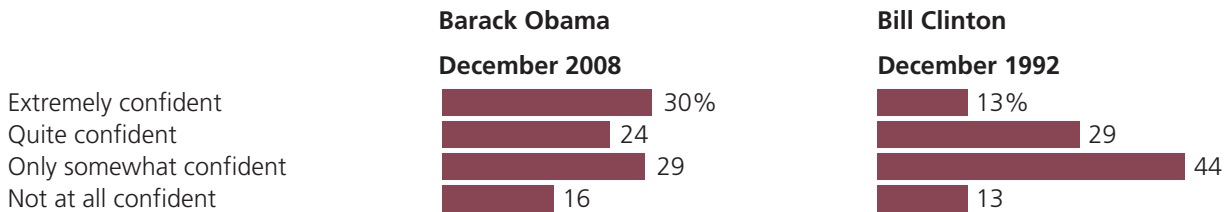
Q: Would you say . . . ?

	Total	Responses of		
		Rep.	Dem.	Ind.
I have a good idea where Barack Obama wants to lead the country	59%	31%	75%	58%
His goals are not very clear	32	58	21	33

Source: Los Angeles Times/Bloomberg, December 2008.

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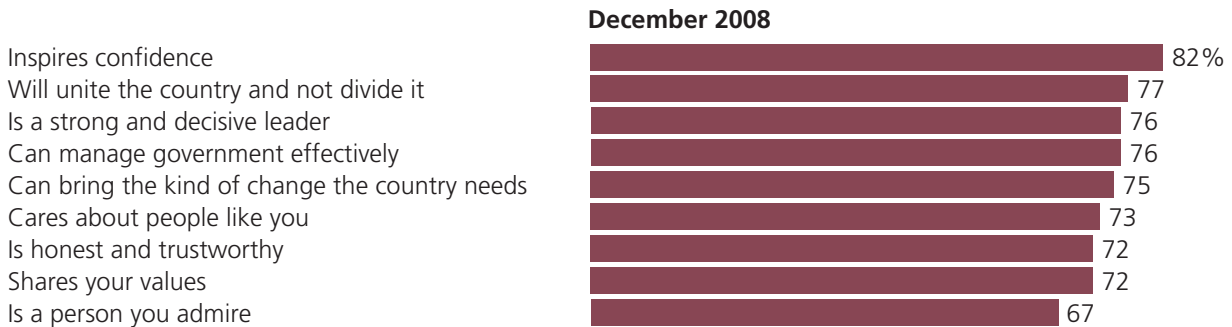
Q: And how confident are you \_\_\_\_\_ has the right set of goals and policies to be president of the United States . . . ?



Source: NBC News/Wall Street Journal.

Q: Thinking about the following characteristics and qualities, please say whether you think . . . ?

**Applies to Barack Obama**



Source: CNN/Opinion Research Corporation, December 2008.

## The First Hundred Days

With more pollsters in the field than ever before, the presidential job approval question is being asked more often. The table below shows a dramatic increase in the pace of polling during a president's first hundred days. Four job approval questions, or one every twenty-five days, were asked during Dwight Eisenhower's first one hundred days in office. Compare that to thirty-seven questions (one every 2.7 days) asked by major pollsters during George W. Bush's inaugural period.

**Poll questions during the first 100 days**

	Number	Frequency
Truman	1	100
Eisenhower	4	25
Kennedy	4	25
Johnson	6	16.67
Nixon	8	12.5
Ford	11	9.09
Carter	14	7.14
Reagan	15	6.67
G. H. W. Bush	27	3.7
Clinton	37	2.7
G. W. Bush	37	2.7

### AEI POLITICAL REPORT CONTRIBUTORS

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# The Bush Legacy

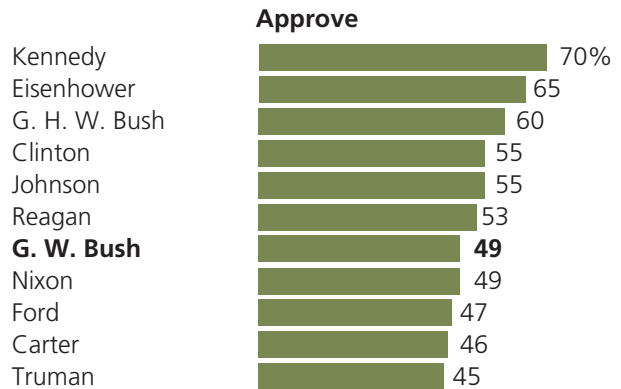
By virtually every measure, the verdict on the presidency of George W. Bush today is a very negative one. Most of the decline in his ratings took place during his second term in office. There is one bright spot. Americans credit him with keeping the country safe from terrorist attacks.

## Bush Yearly Averages

	<i>Job as president</i> Approve	<i>The economy</i> Approve	<i>Foreign affairs</i> Approve
2001	68%	59%	57%
2002	71	59	69
2003	60	47	56
2004	50	45	47
2005	46	42	44
2006	37	39	38
2007	33	41	34
2008	30	27	32
2001–2008	49	47	52

Source: Gallup/USA Today.

## Gallup Approval Averages for Presidents' Full Terms



Note: George W. Bush numbers are to date.  
Source: The Gallup Organization, January 2009.

Q: How do you think President George W. Bush will go down in history . . . ?

	Will go down in history as		
	Outstanding/Above average	Average	Below average/Poor
Reagan	59%	25%	14%
G. H. W. Bush	36	51	12
Clinton	44	32	21
<b>G. W. Bush</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>58</b>

Source: Pew Research Center, December 2008.

Q: Compared with the past several presidents, do you feel . . . ?

	Will turn out to have been		
	George W. Bush Dec. 2008	Bill Clinton Jan. 2001	George H. W. Bush 1989
One of the very best	2%	16%	7%
Better than most	18	40	48
Not as good as most	30	24	31
Definitely worse than most	<b>48</b>	18	6

Source: NBC News/Wall Street Journal.

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Q: Which one of the following things do you think will be remembered as being . . . ?

	Bush's greatest achievement		Bush's greatest failure
Keeping America safe from terrorist attacks since 9/11	35%	Undertaking the war in Iraq	35%
Removing Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq	25	Not preventing the current economic recession	21
Increasing funding for the international fight against AIDS	8	Producing the largest federal deficit in history	21
Cutting taxes	4	Having an inadequate response to Hurricane Katrina	9
Promoting moral values	4	Promoting policies that do more to help the wealthy than the middle class	8
Implementing a series of reforms to public education	4		

Source: NBC News/Wall Street Journal, December 2008.

Q: When it comes to \_\_\_\_\_'s leaving office, would you say . . . ?

	George W. Bush December 2008	Bill Clinton December 2000
I am going to miss him	18%	40%
Not going to miss him	79	55

Source: NBC News/Wall Street Journal.

## State of the Nation

Nearly half of Americans say 2008 was one of the worst years for the United States. A quarter felt that way about 2004. Although Americans believe today's economic conditions are grim, 55 percent say conditions will be good a year from now. More than six in ten are hopeful about what 2009 holds for them.

Q: Compared to other years, do you think that 2008 was . . . ?

	Dec. 2008	Dec. 2004	Dec. 1992
One of the best years for the U.S.	1%	3%	2%
Above-average year	3	12	9
Average year	12	32	28
Below average	36	27	39
One of the worst	47	25	21

Source: NBC News/Wall Street Journal.

Q: How would you rate . . . ?

Q: Now thinking about a year from now . . . ?

	Economic conditions today	A year from now, economic conditions will be
Very good	1%	6%
Somewhat good	6	49
Somewhat poor	27	29
Very poor	66	16

Source: CNN/Opinion Research Corporation, December 2008.

Q: Looking ahead to next year, are you . . . ?

	For you personally	For the world
More hopeful about what 2009 holds	63%	54%
More fearful	35	45

Source: ABC News/Washington Post, December 2008.

## Political Potpourri

### Has the Whole World Gone Maddoff?

*Q: As you may know, a financial advisor named Bernard Madoff has been accused of running an illegal scheme in which many people lost millions of dollars. Do you think . . . ?*

Maddoff is an isolated case that does not reflect on other financial advisors and institutions	23%
Maddoff's behavior is common among financial advisors and institutions	74

Source: CNN/Opinion Research Corporation, December 2008.

### Regulatory Revival?

*Q: In general, do you think . . . ?*

There is too much government regulation of business and industry	39%
The right amount	20
Too little	39

There is too much government regulation of the stock market and financial institutions	22%
The right amount	18
Too little	59

Source: CNN/Opinion Research Corporation, December 2008.

### Still Drawing the Line at Gay Marriage

*Q: Do you think . . . ?*

Marriages between gays and lesbian couples should be recognized by the law as valid	44%
Should not	55

Source: CNN/Opinion Research Corporation, December 2008.

*Q: Do you think . . . ?*

People who are openly gay or homosexual should be allowed to serve in the U.S. military	81%
Should not	17

Source: CNN/Opinion Research Corporation, December 2008.

### Getting the News

*Q: How do you get most of your news about national and international issues?*

	2008	2007
<b>Get most of my national and international news from</b>		
Television	70%	74%
Internet	40	24
Newspapers	35	34

Note: In another question in the December 2008 survey, 59 percent said their main source of news was television, 59 percent the Internet, and 28 percent television. In 2007, those responses were 68, 34, and 23 percent, respectively.

Source: Pew Research Center.

### Fading Faith?

*Q: At the present time, do you think . . . ?*

Religion as a whole is increasing its influence on American life	27%
Losing its influence	67

Source: The Gallup Organization, December 2008.

### Paulson's Popularity: Most Don't Know Him

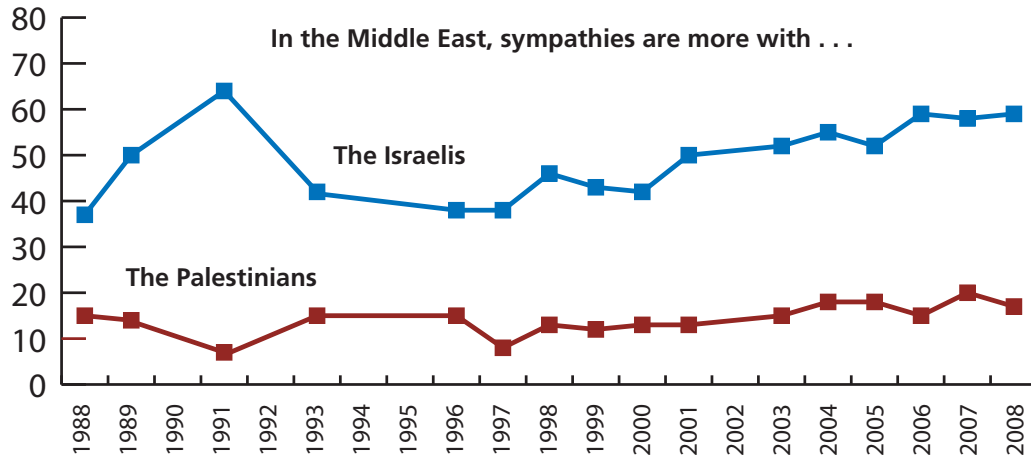
*Q: Now I'm going to read you the names of several public figures, and I'd like you to rate your feelings toward each one as . . . ?*

Feelings about Henry Paulson	
Positive	10%
Neutral	25
Negative	25
Don't know	40

Source: NBC News/Wall Street Journal, December 2008.

## Attitudes About the Middle East

In an essay in *Commentary* magazine a little more than thirty years ago, William Schneider and the late Seymour Martin Lipset, both friends and associates of AEI, reviewed public opinion on the Middle East since Israel's founding in 1948. In the article, they noted that the "record seems clear . . . American sympathy for Israel has remained relatively constant since 1967, and more Americans have been supportive of Israel than the Arabs." A lot has happened since then, but opinion polls taken before Israel's recent incursion into Gaza, show, as the line graph below reveals, that sympathy with Israel is still strong. In a 2008 Gallup survey, 71 percent had a favorable opinion of Israel, and only 14 percent the Palestinian Authority. That said, however, Americans are weary of the seemingly intractable nature of the conflict there.



Note: Numbers are yearly averages. Source: The Gallup Organization.

Q: Do you think there . . . ?

Will come a time when Israel and the Arab nations will be able to settle their differences and live in peace	39%
Will not	59

Source: The Gallup Organization, February 2008.

## Is the Love for Labor Lost?

Q: Do you . . . ?

Approve of labor unions	59%
Disapprove	31

Source: The Gallup Organization, August 2008.

Q: How would you rate . . . ?

My feelings toward labor unions are positive	34%
Neutral	25
Negative	37

Source: NBC News/Wall Street Journal, December 2008.

Q: Would you, personally, like to see . . . ?

Labor unions have more influence than they have today	35%
Same amount	28
Less influence	32

Source: The Gallup Organization, 2008.

## Michelle Rocks

NBC News and the *Wall Street Journal* asked the question below seven times about Hillary Clinton. In December 1992, 66 percent said that she was a positive role model, the highest score she received on the question. Initial reactions to Michelle Obama are more positive.

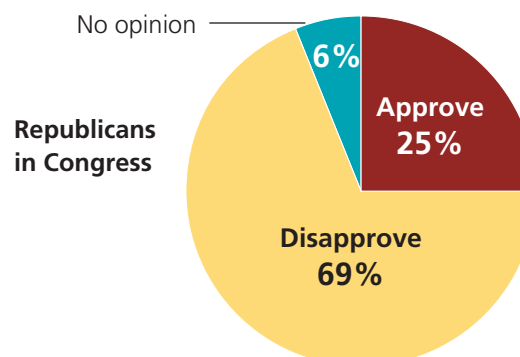
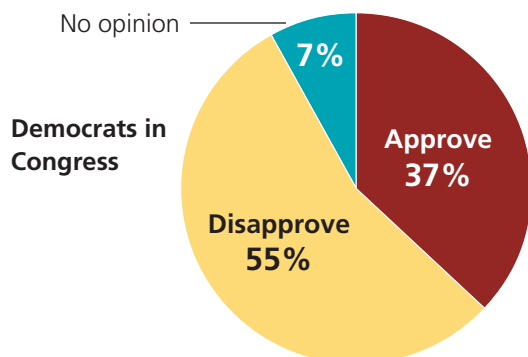
Q: Do you think . . . ?

Michelle Obama is a positive role model for American women	69%
Is not	16
Not sure	15

Source: NBC News/Wall Street Journal, December 2008.

## The Democrats and Republicans in Congress

Q: Do you approve or disapprove of the way \_\_\_\_\_ are handling their job?



Source: Gallup/USA Today, December 2008.

## Current Commentary

### Transition Talk

AEI scholars have been writing a lot about the transition from President George W. Bush to President-elect Barack Obama. What are the potential pitfalls for the newly elected president? How can he hit the ground running with the Congress? Norm Ornstein and John Fortier provide key insight in to how Obama can accomplish this Herculean task.

**“Bush Willing to Help with Transition; What about the Senate?”** by Norm Ornstein

<http://www.aei.org/publication28858/>

**“Presidential Transition Process Is in Need of a Major Upgrade”** by Norm Ornstein

<http://www.aei.org/publication28777/>

**“Ensuring a Seamless Transition”** by John Fortier

<http://www.aei.org/publication28285/>

**“What Happens When Voters Don’t Decide?”**

AEI research fellow John Fortier analyzes the post-election mess in Illinois and Minnesota.

<http://www.aei.org/publication29072/>

**“No Permanent Majorities in America”**

AEI resident fellow Michael Barone argues that if history is a guide, the impressive Democratic gains in 2008 are not a harbinger for an enduring majority.

<http://www.aei.org/publication29140/>

**“Americans Lean toward Israel”**

AEI senior fellow Karlyn Bowman looks at American attitudes toward Israel and Palestine over time, pointing out remarkable consistency in U.S. public opinion.

<http://www.aei.org/publication29137/>

**“Rules Changes Must Allow for More Open Process in the House”**

AEI resident scholar Norm Ornstein contends that the best way to ensure essential change on key issues is to reform Congressional rules.

<http://www.aei.org/publication29153/>

**“What Happens When Voters Don’t Decide?”**

AEI research fellow John Fortier analyzes the post-election mess in Illinois and Minnesota.

<http://www.aei.org/publication29072/>

**AEI Public Opinion Studies**

AEI senior fellow Karlyn Bowman recently updated her must-see AEI Public Opinion Study, “Economic Insecurity: Americans’ Concerns about Their Jobs, Personal Finances, Retirement, Health Care, Housing and More.”

[http://www.aei.org/publication25668.](http://www.aei.org/publication25668/)