

AEI Political Report

Obama in Motion

Views about how President Barack Obama is handling his responsibilities as president are generally positive, although negative impressions about his handling of the economy have risen. Favorable impressions of Barack Obama and Vice President Joe Biden have dropped, but Michelle Obama is more popular than four months ago and more popular than her husband. Nearly six in ten view the Democratic Party favorably; four in ten give that response about the GOP.

Q: Do you approve or disapprove of the way Barack Obama is handling . . . ?

	—His job as president—		—Foreign affairs—		—The economy—	
	Approve	Disapprove	Approve	Disapprove	Approve	Disapprove
February 2009	63%	26%	54%	22%	59%	30%
May 2009	61	34	59	32	55	42

Note: In the late May poll, 55 percent approved of the job the president was doing handling terrorism, while 37 percent disapproved. Forty-six percent approved of his handling of the budget deficit (48 percent disapproved). Forty-five percent approved of his efforts to control federal spending, while 51 percent disapproved.

Source: Gallup/USA Today.

Q: As I read some names, please tell me if you have a . . . ?

	—Barack Obama—		—Joe Biden—		—Michelle Obama—	
	Favorable	Unfavorable	Favorable	Unfavorable	Favorable	Unfavorable
January 2009	78%	18%	63%	20%	68%	18%
May 2009	67	32	51	28	76	13

Source: Gallup/USA Today.

Source: PSRA/Pew Research Center.

Q: I'd like to get your opinion of some groups and organizations. Is your overall opinion of . . . ?

	The Democratic Party		The Republican Party	
	Favorable	Unfavorable	Favorable	Unfavorable
January 2009	62%	32%	40%	55%
April 2009	59	34	40	51

Source: PSRA/Pew Research Center.



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Party Profiles

In May, Gallup reported that movement away from the GOP between 2001 and 2009 occurred among virtually all major age, racial, regional, educational, income subgroups, and among men and women and married and unmarried individuals. The party lost only a little ground among conservatives and held steady among frequent churchgoers. The data below, from Gallup and Pew, provide some perspective on the strength of the parties. In Pew's poll, GOP identification is at its lowest point in two decades; just 23 percent identify as Republicans. Pew tells us that the GOP has lost a quarter of its adherents over the past five years. There may be a ray of hope for the GOP in these polls: Thus far in 2009, Republican losses haven't translated into Democratic gains. In the Reagan years, according to Pew, Democratic losses did translate into GOP gains. More recently, Republican defectors have moved into the independent camp. The proportion of independents is at its highest point in seventy years.

AGE: Democrats enjoy an advantage over Republicans among every age group in recent Gallup and Pew polling. That advantage is especially pronounced among the young. It remains to be seen whether Barack Obama will be able to cement a generational allegiance among them. The average age of those who identify as Republicans has been getting older: twenty years ago, it was 44, now it is 48. The average age of self-identified Democrats is unchanged.

Average age (Pew)

	2009	1990
Republican	48.3 years	44.1
Democrat	46.6	46.8
Independent	43.8	41

Percentage age 50 and older today

Republican	46%
Democrat	44
Independent	37

REGION: Republican strength in party identification in all four regions has declined since 2001 in Pew and Gallup data.

Turning to actual votes, according to a recent analysis by the *National Journal*, the Republican Electoral College and popular vote tally outside the South since 1992 is "the party's worst performance for any five-election sequence" since 1854. The South has provided "at least 59 percent of the Electoral College vote by the GOP nominee since the 1992 election." The GOP's reliance on the South and erosion elsewhere are signs of significant problems.

Party identification by region (Pew)

In the...	Northeast		Midwest		South		West	
	2009	1990	2009	1990	2009	1990	2009	1990
Republican	20%	31%	24%	30%	25%	32%	23%	34%
Democrat	38	34	31	31	35	36	34	31
Independent	37	30	38	32	34	27	36	29

GENDER: In Gallup's polling from the first quarter of 2009, Democrats had a double-digit advantage over Republicans among women. Among men in the Pew and Gallup data, the two parties remain competitive. In recent years, many men have moved from the GOP camp into the independent camp.

Party identification by gender (Gallup)

	Men	Women
Republican	24%	22%
Democrat	28	41
Independent	42	31

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EDUCATION: Here we show Gallup data on party identification and those who lean to the party among college graduates. The parties were closely matched in 2001. Today, the Democrats have a substantial advantage. The Republicans have lost more ground among those with a postgraduate education (13 percentage points) than those with a college education (10 points) in the 2001 to 2009 period. A recent analysis by the *National Journal* shows that Democrats carried 78 of the 100 counties with the highest percentage of college graduates today. In 1988, the Republicans won two-thirds of those same counties.

Party identification among college graduates (Gallup)

	2001	2009
Democrat or lean to the Democratic Party	46%	52%
Republican or lean to the Republican Party	47	37

RACE and ETHNICITY: Whites were 90 percent of the electorate in the 1976 election; in 2008, they were 74 percent. In Pew’s data from 2009, 88 percent of self-identified Republicans are white, 2 percent black, and 6 percent Hispanic. Among Democrats, 56 percent are white, 22 percent black, and 15 percent Hispanic.

	Republicans	Democrats	Independents
White	88%	56%	72%
Black	2	22	7
Hispanic	6	15	12

Note: Sixty-eight percent of adults in Pew’s survey said they were white, 12 percent black, and 14 percent Hispanic.

THE BOTTOM LINE: Democrats enjoy substantial advantages today.

Q: In politics today, do you consider yourself a Republican, Democrat, or Independent?

	Gallup	Pew
Republican and those who lean to the party	39%	36%
Democrat and those who lean to the party	53	53

Source: Data for the Party Profiles section come from Gallup and Pew, 2009.

The Next Republican Captain: TBA

Q: Next, I’m going to read a list of people who may be running in the Republican primary for president in 2012. After I read all the names, please tell me which candidate you would be most likely to support for the Republican nomination for president in the year 2012, or if you would support someone else.

	Republicans Would support for Republican nomination in 2012
Former Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee	22%
Alaska Governor Sarah Palin	21
Former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney	21
Former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich	13
Former Florida Governor Jeb Bush	6

Source: CNN/Opinion Research Corporation, May 2009.

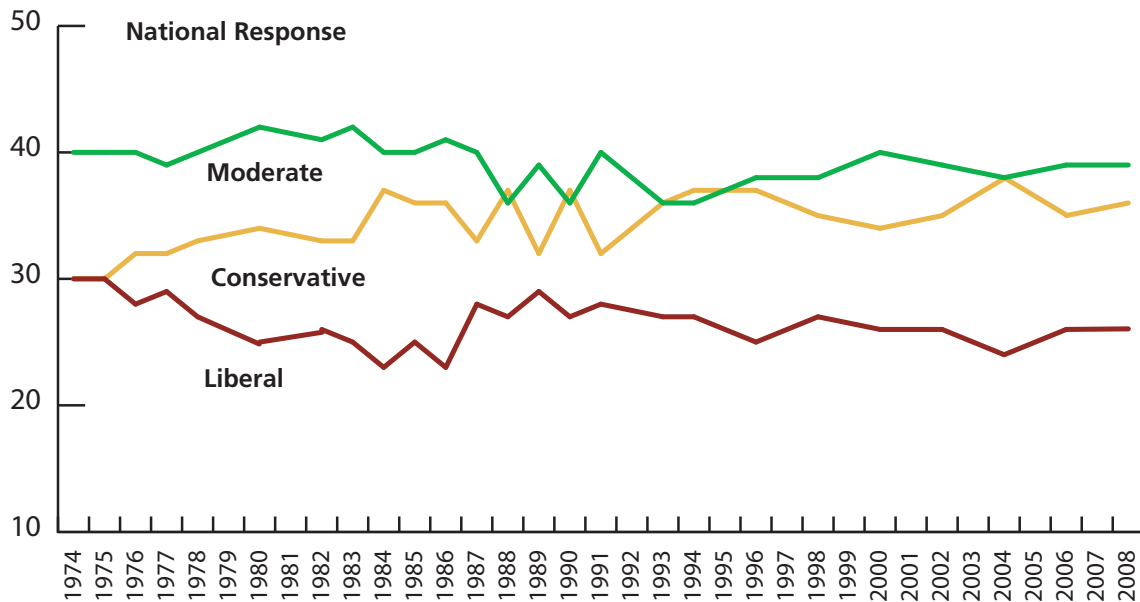
Save the Date—Continuity of Government Commission Issues New Report

On July 2nd, the AEI-Brookings Continuity of Government Commission will release a new report on presidential succession. A catastrophic attack could render the current line of succession useless, leaving America in an especially vulnerable position. The latest report from this blue-ribbon bipartisan commission offers seven specific recommendations for fixing the flaws in the current presidential succession process. AEI will host a panel discussion on July 2nd to discuss problems with the existing system of succession and potential reforms to improve the process. More details to come; please see www.aei.org.

Ideological Identification: A Clear Case of Consistency

Despite dramatic changes in the fortunes of the political parties and in party affiliation in the past thirty-five years, ideological identification nationally has remained remarkably stable. Among young people, there has been some movement. In recent years, there has been an uptick in the proportion of college freshmen calling themselves liberal and, separately, conservative, but most of them say they are somewhere in between. Pew notes that although Barack Obama is taking the nation in a very different direction from his predecessor on economic, domestic, and foreign policy issues, “there is no commensurate sea-change in public values.”

Q: Do you think of yourself as . . . ?

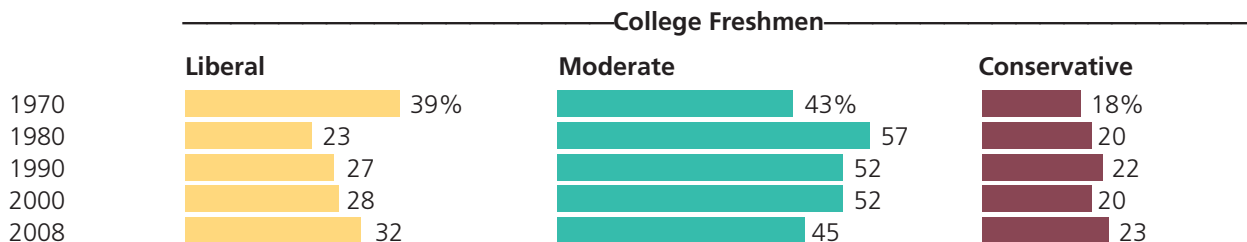


Source: National Opinion Research Center.

On June 15, Gallup released the results of polling conducted thus far in 2009 and found that 40 percent identified themselves as conservative, 35 percent as moderate, and 21 percent as liberal. For 2008, those responses were 37 percent conservative, 37 percent moderate, and 22 percent liberal. Gallup notes that these figures “have shown little change over the past decade.”

Seventy-three percent of Republicans called themselves conservative, 24 percent moderate, and 3 percent liberal. Twenty-two percent of Democrats described themselves as conservative, 40 percent as moderate, and 38 percent liberal. Thirty-four percent of independents called themselves conservative, 45 percent moderate, and 20 percent liberal.

Q: How would you characterize your political views?



Note: Sample is of college freshmen.

Source: The Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA.

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Q: In politics today, do you consider yourself a Republican, Democrat, or Independent?

Party ID within ideological groups (Pew)

Among conservatives

46% called themselves Republicans in 2000
41% do so today

Among liberals

50% called themselves Democrats in 2000
59% do so today

Composition of the parties today (Pew)

Republicans

66% call themselves conservatives,
27% moderates, and 5% liberals

Democrats

40% call themselves moderates, 32% liberals,
and 24% conservatives.

Q: Now I am going to read you a series of statements that will help us understand how you feel about a number of things. For each statement, please tell me if you . . . ?

I don't pay attention to whether a candidate calls himself or herself a liberal or a conservative

	Agree	Disagree
November 1991	64%	32%
April 2009	62	31

Source: Pew Research Center, latest that of March–April 2009.

The Social Issues Scene

The culture wars have raged for over four decades. What do the polls tell us about public views on particular issues that have played a role in these debates? We look here at views about marijuana, abortion, gays, and guns. On some fronts there has been dramatic change; on others, we have seen little change and the two sides remain stalemated.

Marijuana More Acceptable

Q: Do you . . . ?

Q: In general, do you . . . ?

	Favor legalizing the possession of small amounts of marijuana
May 1985	26%
April 2009	46

Note: Gallup also asks whether "marijuana should be made legal." In 2005, the last time they asked the question, 36 percent said it should be legal, up from 12 percent in 1968. The 2005 response was the highest in the 40-year history of the question.
Source: ABC News/Washington Post.

**—College Freshmen—
Agree marijuana should
be legalized**

1968	20%
1978	48
1988	20
1998	33
2008	41

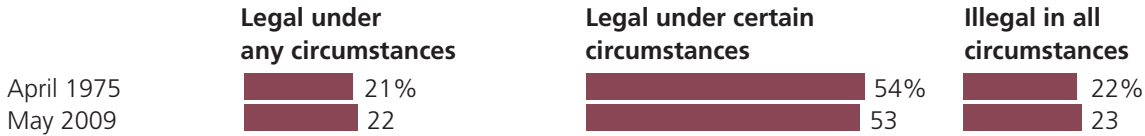
Note: Sample is of college freshmen.
Source: The Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA.

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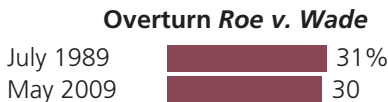
Abortion: Views on Policy Stable, But More Call Themselves Pro-Life

Q: Do you think abortions should be legal . . . ?



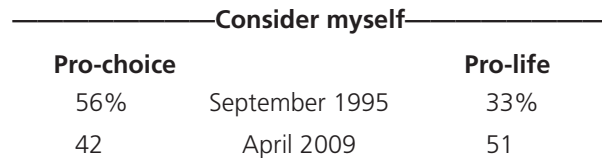
Source: The Gallup Organization.

Q: The 1973 Roe versus Wade decision established a woman's constitutional right to an abortion, at least in the first three months of pregnancy. Would you like to see the Supreme Court . . . ?



Source: Gallup/CNN/USA Today, July 1989; CNN/Opinion Research Corporation, May 2009.

Q: With respect to the abortion issue, would you . . . ?



Note: A May 2009 Fox News/Opinion Dynamics poll also showed an uptick for the pro-life label. In the new poll, 49 percent reported pro-life views while 43 percent said they were pro-choice. In 1997, 40 percent said they were pro-life and 50 percent said pro-choice. Source: The Gallup Organization.

Gay Marriage Gaining Ground

Q: Do you think . . . ?

Marriages between same-sex couples should be recognized as valid, with the same rights as traditional marriages



Note: Question wording in 1996 was "Do you think marriages between homosexuals should or should not be recognized by the law as valid, with the same rights as traditional marriages?" An April 2009 ABC News/Washington Post poll shows for the first time a plurality, 49 percent, saying that "it should be legal for gay and lesbian couples to get married." Forty-six percent were opposed. Source: The Gallup Organization.

Shrinking Support for Stricter Gun Control?

Q: Do you . . . ?

Favor stricter gun control laws in this country

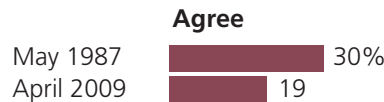


Source: ABC News/Washington Post.

Tradition!

Q: Now I am going to read you another series of statements on some different topics. For each statement, please tell me if you . . . ?

Women should return to their traditional roles in society



I have old-fashioned values about family and marriage



There are clear guidelines about what's good or evil that apply to everyone regardless of their situation

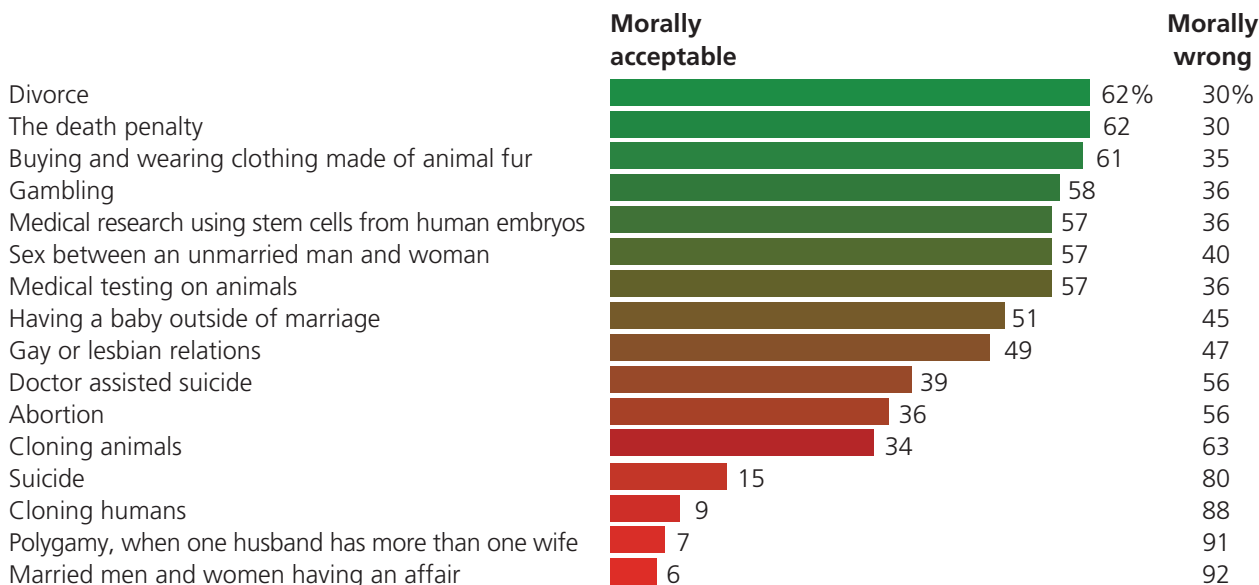


Source: PSRA/Pew Research Center.

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Q: Next, I'm going to read you a list of issues. Regardless of whether or not you think it should be legal, for each one, please tell me whether you personally believe that in general it is morally acceptable or morally wrong. How about . . . ?



Source: The Gallup Organization, May 2009.

Pelosi's Problems

Congress's ratings have risen lately, but the same can't be said for House Speaker Nancy Pelosi. Half of Americans now have an unfavorable view of her, up from 22 percent in January. She's suffered from the controversy over interrogating terrorism suspects.

Q: Do you . . . ?

	Approve of the way Congress is handling its job	Disapprove
January 2009	19%	76%
May 2009	37	57

Source: Gallup/USA Today.

Q: Next, we'd like to get your overall opinion of some people in the news. As I read each name, please say if you have a . . . ?

	Favorable opinion of Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi	Unfavorable
January 2007	44%	22%
May 2009	34	50

Source: Gallup/USA Today.

Q: Do you . . . ?

	Obama	The CIA	Pelosi
Approve of how _____ is handling the matter of interrogation techniques used against terrorism suspects	59%	52%	31%
Disapprove	29	31	47

Source: The Gallup Organization, May 2009.



Afghanistan and Iraq

In a recent interview, Defense Secretary Robert Gates said that support for the war in Afghanistan would wane unless the administration took strong action to counter the Taliban. “People are willing to stay in the fight, I believe, if they think we are making headway,” he said. Americans are more positive about how things are going in Iraq today than they are about the situation in Afghanistan.

Q: In general, how would you say . . . ?

How things are going for the U.S.



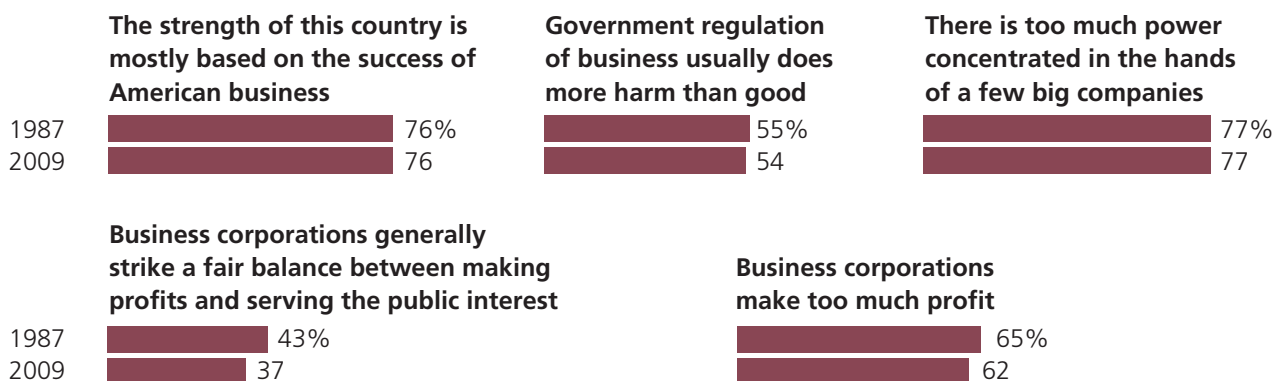
Source: CNN/ORC, May 2009.

The Business Page

American attitudes toward business have been remarkably stable since Pew initiated its annual core values survey in the late 1980s. In 1987, 76 percent of those surveyed agreed that the strength of this country is mostly based on the success of American business. In Pew’s March–April 2009 poll, the same proportion gave that response. Majorities of Americans also believe that government regulation of business usually does more harm than good. That said, Americans’ view of business as a whole is complex. Americans believe, for instance, that corporations make too much profit, and less than four in ten Americans believe that business corporations strike a fair balance between profit and the public interest. As shown on the next page, Wall Street has taken a public relations hit in the wake of the economic crisis, but a majority still believe that Wall Street and what it does benefit the country.

Q: Now I am going to read you a series of statements that will help us understand how you feel about a number of things. For each statement, please tell me if you . . . ?

Percent Agree



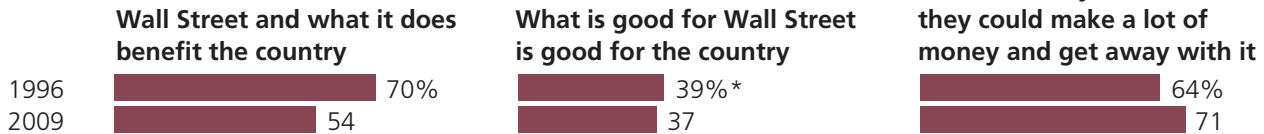
Source: Pew Research Center, latest that of March–April 2009.



And What About Wall Street?

Q: Overall, would you say that Wall Street and what it does . . . ?

Q: Please say if you tend to agree or disagree with the following . . . ?



Note: *Question asked in 1997.

Source: Harris Interactive, latest that of February 2009.

The American Dream

When President Obama announced his nomination of Sonia Sotomayor to serve on the Supreme Court, he said that she has “lived out the American dream,” and the theme has been a powerful one in coverage of her nomination. For most Americans, the dream is still alive; many feel they have already achieved it.

Q: Compared to your parents when they were the age you are now, do you think . . . ?

My standard of living is better than my parents at the same age	58%
About the same	20
Worse	21

Source: CBS News/*New York Times*, April 2009.

Q: Do you think, you will reach, as you define it . . . ?

Have already reached the American Dream	44%
Will reach it in my lifetime	31
Will not reach it in my lifetime	20

Source: CBS News/*New York Times*, April 2009.

Q: Do you think . . . ?

It is still possible to start out poor in this country, work hard, and become rich	72%
Is not possible	24

Source: CBS News/*New York Times*, April 2009.

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

America’s best days are ahead of us	57%
Behind us	33
Depends/don’t know	10

Source: Fox News/*Opinion Dynamics*, May 2009.

Labour’s Low

It appears that Gordon Brown has survived at least for the time being the drubbing he took in local council and European parliamentary elections. In almost all polls this year, the Conservatives have led Labour.

Q: If an election were held in the UK today, would you . . . ?

Vote for the Conservative Party	40%
Labour Party	24
Liberal Democrats	18

Source: YouGov for the *Sunday Times*, June 12, 2009.



Early Soundings on Sotomayor

Initial reactions to Sonia Sotomayor have been positive. In a new Quinnipiac poll, 54 percent approved of the president's nomination of her, 24 percent disapproved, and 22 percent didn't yet have an opinion. In this poll and in others from past nominations, Americans say legal qualifications are more important than diversity. They want a judge who is a moderate, or one who hews slightly to the right. Three in ten in Quinnipiac's poll said Sotomayor was more liberal than they would like, 5 percent not liberal enough, and 42 percent about right.

Q: As you may know, _____ is the federal judge nominated to serve on the Supreme Court. Would you . . . ?

	Would like to see the Senate vote in favor of	Would not
Sonia Sotomayor (May 2009)	54%	28%
Samuel Alito (November 2005)	50	25
Harriet Miers (October 2005)	44	36
John Roberts (July 2005)	59	22
Ruth Bader Ginsburg (June 1993)	53	14
Clarence Thomas (July 1991)	52	17
Robert Bork (August–September 1987)	31	25

Note: Question wordings vary slightly.
Source: Gallup/USA Today.

Q: From what you know about _____, do you . . . ?

	Think he/she would be too liberal as a Supreme Court Justice	Too conservative	About right
Sonia Sotomayor (May 2009)	28%	3%	48%
Samuel Alito (January 2006)	6	29	49
John Roberts (August 2005)	8	24	48
Ruth Bader Ginsburg (June 1993)	14	4	47
Clarence Thomas (July 1991)	7	20	46

Note: Question wordings vary slightly.
Source: Gallup/USA Today.

Q: Would you say that Supreme Court nominee Sonia Sotomayor is . . . ?

More liberal than I would like	30%
Not liberal enough	5
About right	44

Source: Quinnipiac University, May 2009.

Q: As you may know, the United States Supreme Court will be deciding a case involving New Haven, Connecticut firefighters use of promotion tests for firefighters. Because no black scored high enough to qualify for promotion, the city decided to throw the test out. Do you think . . . ?

Q: As you may know, Sonia Sotomayor voted to uphold New Haven's decision as an appellate court judge. Does this make you . . . ?

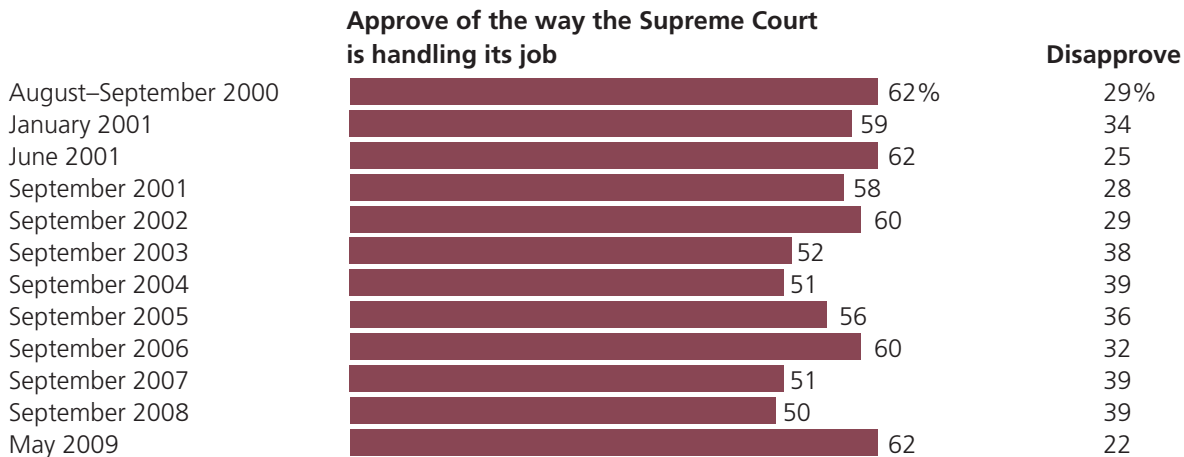
Court should uphold the city	19%	Sotomayor's vote to uphold the city makes me more likely to favor her appointment	7%
Court should order the city to promote the fourteen white and one Hispanic firefighter who scored high enough for promotion	71	Less likely	28
		Doesn't make a difference	59

Source: Quinnipiac University, May 2009.

Consistency and the Court

Approval of the Supreme Court did not change significantly in the months after the hotly contested 2000 election. During this period Republicans became more favorable and Democrats less so, but the partisan divide soon disappeared. Today, roughly six in ten approve of the way the Court is handling its job. Trust and confidence in the Court has not varied as much as it has for the executive and legislative branches.

Q: Do you . . . ?



Source: The Gallup Organization, 2001–2008; Quinnipiac, May–June 2009.

Q: Let me ask you how much trust and confidence you have at this time in . . . ?

	Trust and confidence		
	Great deal/fair amount	Not very much	None at all
The judicial branch			
May 1972	66%	24%	7%
September 2008	69	23	6
The executive branch			
May 1972	73	20	4
September 2008	42	30	28
The legislative branch			
May 1972	71	22	3
September 2008	47	38	12

Source: The Gallup Organization.

Flu Figures

In April 2009, 40 percent of adults told Harris interviewers they had gotten a vaccination, up slightly from 36 percent the year before. Men and women were equally likely to get a flu shot. Older people were more likely than younger ones to have done so.

Q: Did you have a flu vaccine shot before this winter?

Q: Did you get the flu this winter?

Adults who got a flu shot before the winter	40%
Percent of adults who got the flu	18

Source: Harris Interactive online survey, April 2009.

Are Things Looking Up?

Most Americans are happy about their lives. They are more pessimistic about the happiness of their fellow Americans. Views about the economy appear to be improving as well.

Q: *Taking all aspects of their lives into account, how . . . ?*

Q: *How about you personally . . . ?*

	Americans today	You personally
Are/am very happy	2%	20%
Happy	15	36
Only somewhat happy	53	28
Not really happy at all	27	15

Source: Fox News/Opinion Dynamics, May 2009.

Q: *Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements.*

At this time, I'm generally happy with my life	81%
Disagree	16

Source: Harris Interactive online survey, April 2009.

Q: *Generally speaking, would you say . . . ?*

Things in this country are heading in the right direction	54%
Off on the wrong track	39

Source: RBC/Ipsos, May 2009.

Comparing the Chiefs

Q: *As I read each name, please say if you have a . . . ?*

	Favorable opinion
Barack Obama in late May	67%
George W. Bush in June his of first year	62
Bill Clinton in June of his first year	48

Source: The Gallup Organization, latest that of May 2009.

Economic Indicator

Index of Consumer Sentiment

September 2008 (Recent High)	70.3
November 2008 (Recent Low)	55.3
May 2009	68.7
June 2009 (Preliminary)	69.0

Source: University of Michigan/Reuters Index of Consumer Sentiment.

Q: *The Obama administration has recently said there are signs the economy is starting to improve. Do you . . . ?*

Believe the economy is starting to get better	45%
Obama administration is putting a positive spin on things	42

Source: Fox News/Opinion Dynamics, May 2009.

Q: *Do you think . . . ?*

The nation's economy is getting better	40%
Getting worse	42
Staying the same (volunteered response)	16

Source: Fox News/Opinion Dynamics, June 2009.

Federal Fixes?

Q: *Who do you think is better qualified . . . ?*

Federal government is better qualified to manage major American businesses and corporations that are having financial problems	27%
Business executives are	49
Both (volunteered response)	8
Neither (volunteered response)	12

Note: Forty-five percent of Democrats thought the federal government was better qualified on this score. Eleven percent of Republicans did.

Source: Fox News/Opinion Dynamics, June 2009.