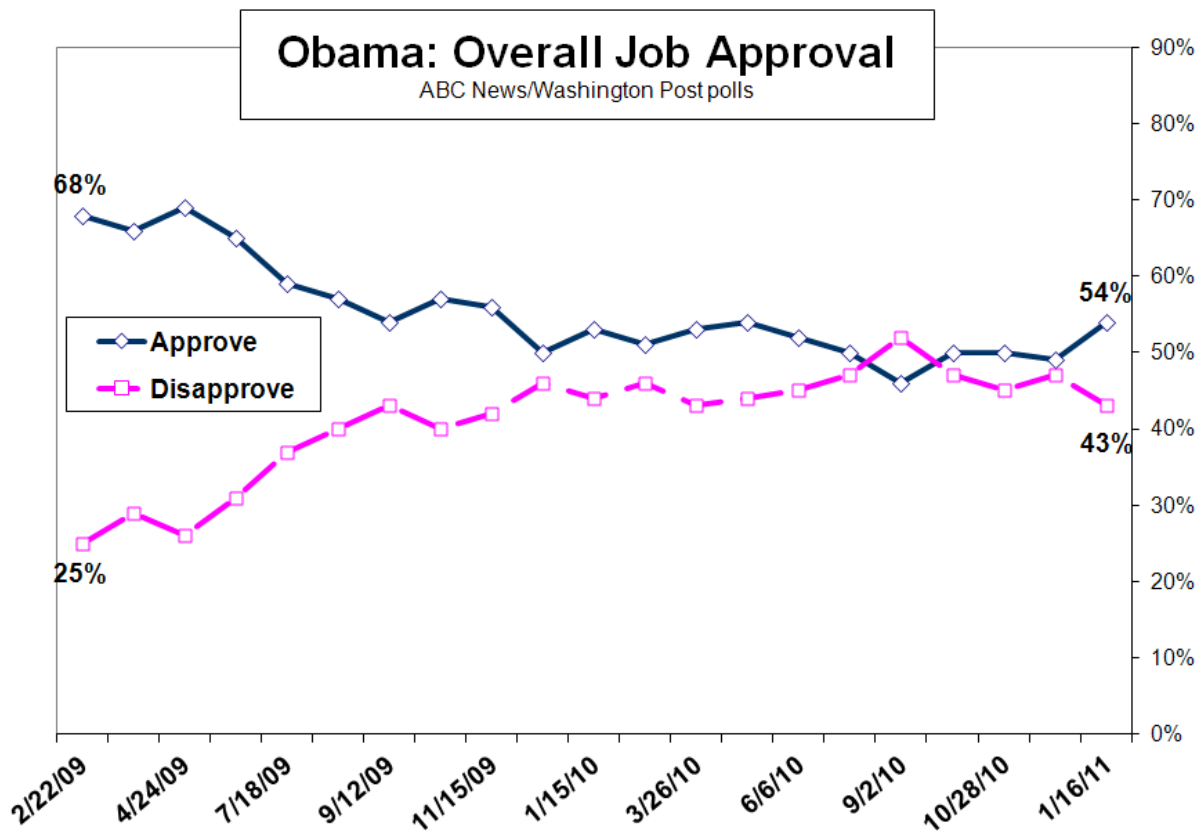


## **Obama Approval Moves Ahead Though Challenges Aplenty Remain**

Aided by his response to the Tucson shootings, popular lame-duck legislation and a hint of economic relief, Barack Obama has matched his highest job approval in more than a year in the latest ABC News/Washington Post poll, with his ratings for empathy likewise rebounding.

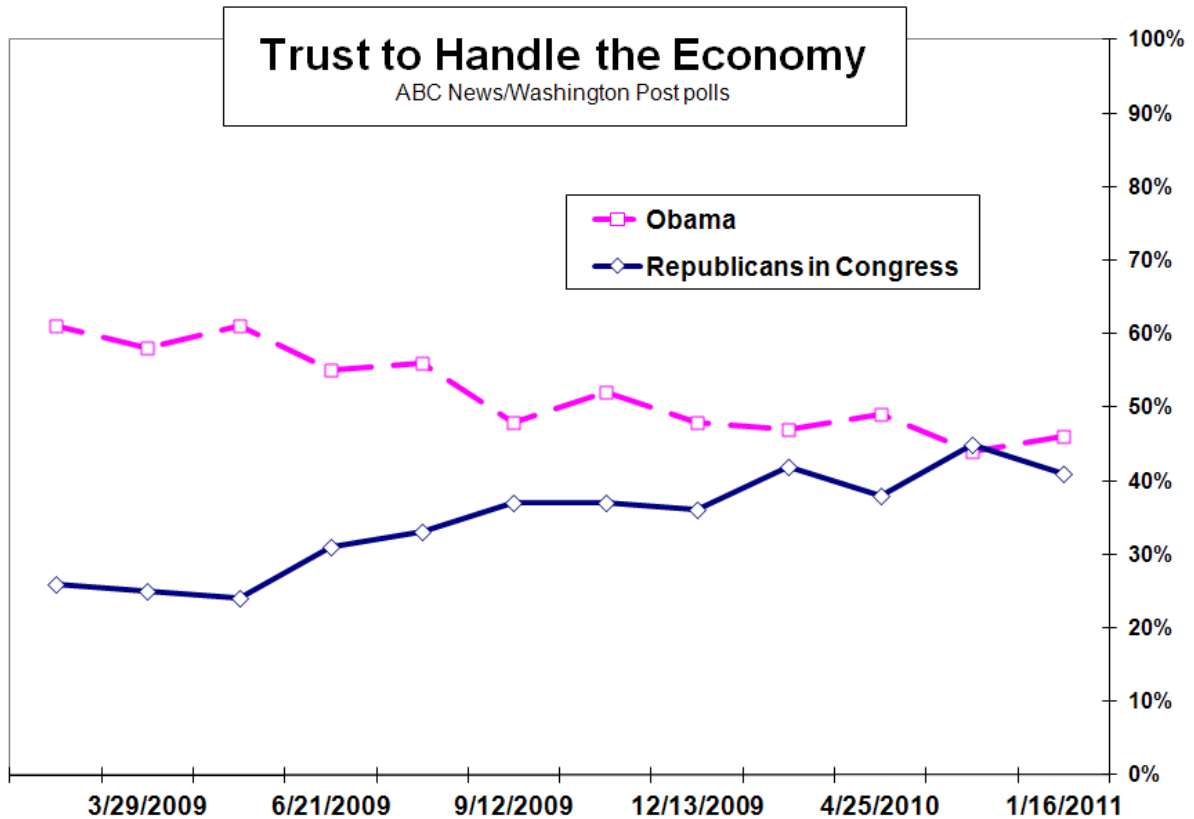
It's a remarkable turnaround for a president so recently hammered in the 2010 midterm elections. Yet the public's mood remains glum, if slightly less so, with attendant, continuing hazards for the president and Congress alike.

Fifty-four percent now approve of Obama's job performance, up 5 points from last month and 8 points above his career low in September. And given overwhelming approval of his response to the Tucson attack, Americans by an 18-point margin, 58-40 percent, say Obama "understands the problems of people like you." That's up from a mere 2-point split, 50-48 percent, in September.



In another critical element, albeit still with much room for improvement, 35 percent say Obama’s economic program is making the economy better, while 24 percent say he’s making it worse – the positive result up by 5 points since September, the negative down by 9. Strikingly, the view that Obama’s made the economy worse has eased most broadly in an unexpected quarter: down by 17 points among Republicans.

Concurrently, the president has inched back ahead in trust to handle the economy, a month after the GOP caught up with him on this issue for the first time.



Overall just 13 percent describe the nation’s economy positively; while still miserably low, that’s up a slight 4 points from October to the most since February 2008. More significantly, the number describing the nation’s economy as “poor” is down by 8 points, also since October, to 41 percent in this new survey, produced for ABC News by [Langer Research Associates](#).

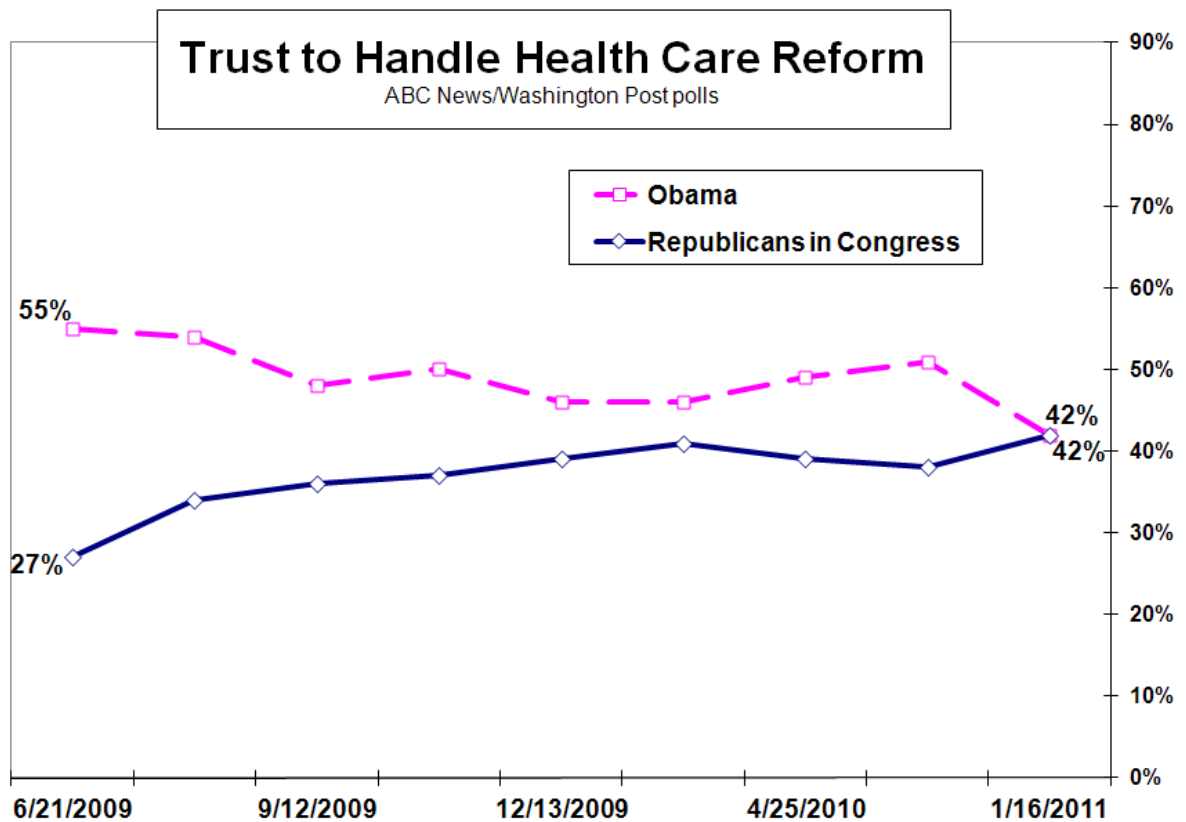
Seventy-two percent say the economy should be a highest-priority issue for Obama and the Congress, far surpassing all others. And signs it’s still plenty bad enough to keep the public in a snit: While 38 percent say the country is heading in the right direction, up 7 points since last month and the most since March, that nonetheless leaves 60 percent who continue to say the country is headed seriously off on the wrong track.

**COMPETITION** – In terms of Obama’s competition with the new Republican leadership of the House, 44 percent think the country should go in the direction Obama wants to lead, while 35

percent prefer to follow the Republicans in Congress. On one hand that's a 9-point advantage for Obama; on the other it's short of majority preference for either side. And independents, the country's political centerweight, divide essentially evenly on the question, 37-36 percent. Obama does better because Democrats outnumber Republicans.

At the same time, this rating is far weaker for the Republicans now than it was for the Democrats when they took control of Congress four years ago; at that time 57 percent preferred the congressional Democrats' direction to the incumbent president's. Then again, George W. Bush's approval rating in January 2007 was a dismal 33 percent, 21 points below Obama's today.

One key issue is better for the GOP: For the first time in ABC/Post polling, Obama and the Republicans are tied in trust to handle health care reform – with trust in Obama dropping 9 points since last month to a new low, and trust in the Republicans gaining a scant 4 points. A Republican-backed vote to repeal the health care law is scheduled for this week.



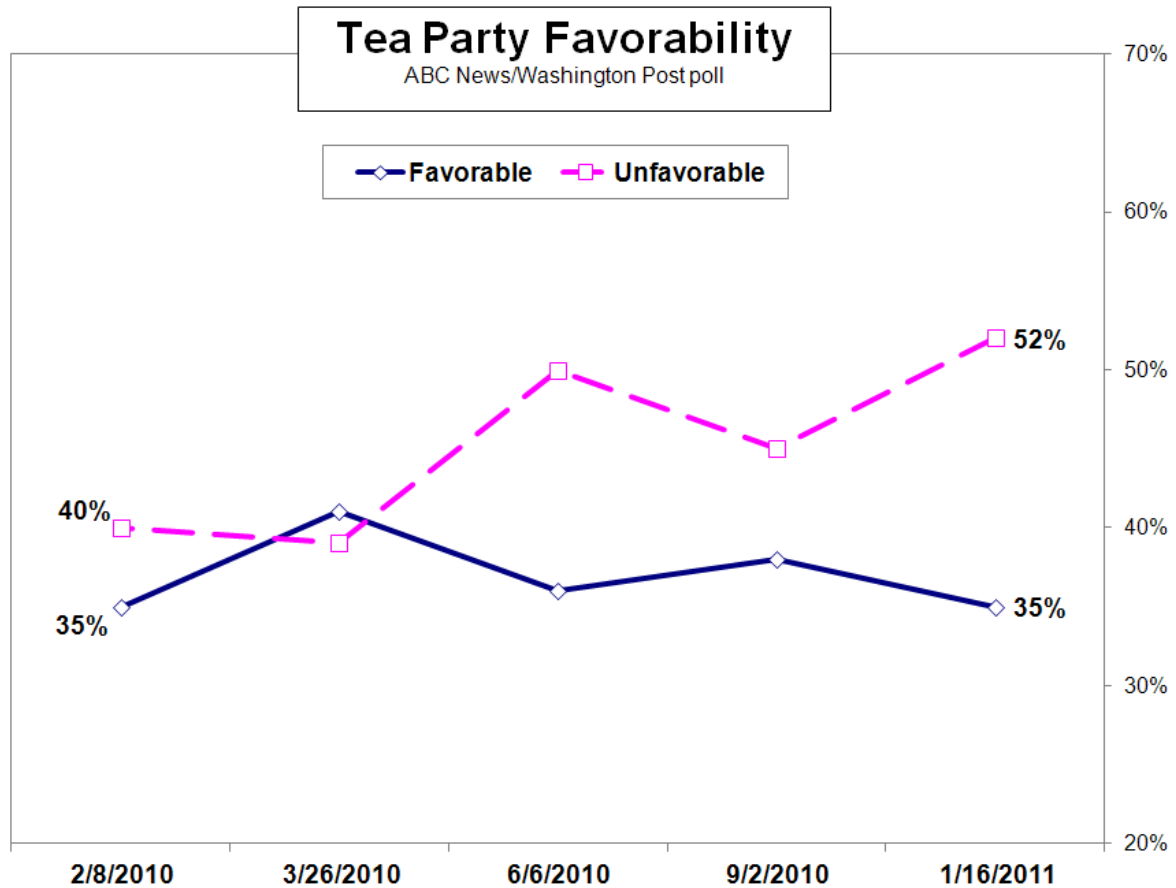
On this, it's independents making the difference; they've moved from a 50-35 percent preference for Obama on health care a month ago to a 48-31 percent tilt toward the GOP today. (There'll be more from this poll on health care in a forthcoming analysis.)

More broadly, approval of Congress is up by 5 points, but from a near-historic low to simply very, very low – 28 percent. (Bad as it is, that's its highest since February 2008.) New House Speaker John Boehner's approval rating stands at 39 percent – lower than Nancy Pelosi's when

she took over as speaker in 2007 (54 percent), while about the same as Newt Gingrich's starting mark, 35 percent, in 1995. Many, 33 percent, have no opinion of Boehner; his initial disapproval, 27 percent, is about the same as Pelosi's, and 10 points lower than Gingrich's.

While both Obama and the Congress have ticked up in their ratings, the Tea Party political movement's gone in the other direction – a 7-point increase in the number of Americans who see it unfavorably, now 52 percent, more than half for the first time. That includes a 10-point increase among Democrats, to 74 percent unfavorable, and 8 points among independents, to 50 percent. Republicans are much more apt to see the Tea Party favorably – 59 percent do so.

Notably, twice as many Americans now see the Tea Party “strongly” unfavorably as strongly favorably, the widest division in intensity since ABC and the Post first polled on the movement last February. A key reason is that just 27 percent of Republicans strongly favor the movement, while twice as many Democrats, 52 percent, see it strongly unfavorably.



And there's Sarah Palin, measured in this survey in terms of her response to the Tucson incident. As reported Monday, just 30 percent approve. And as with the Tea Party, Palin's strong disapprovers (specifically on the Tucson shooting) outnumber her strong approvers by 2-1.

ISSUES – Some of Obama’s ratings on handling individual issues, while still tepid, are up from their lows. His 46 percent approval on handling the economy compares with a low of 41 percent in September. He’s +5 on handling the deficit from last month, albeit just to 43 percent. And his 49 percent approval on Afghanistan is slightly up from 45 percent last month.

At the same time his approval rating on health care, at 43 percent, matches his career low.

Trends on trust to handle issues are similar. As noted, the Republicans in Congress have pulled even with the president in trust to handle health care; on others Obama’s improved. He’s got a 46-41 percent edge in trust to handle the economy, vs. an essentially even rating last month. Trust to handle the deficit has gone from +8 GOP last month to a scant +3 Obama now. And the president’s gained especially in trust to handle Afghanistan, now with a surprising 52-31 percent advantage; the winter lull in casualties may be a factor.

In terms of priorities for Obama and the Congress in the year ahead, as noted, the economy rules, with 72 percent calling it a highest priority, little changed from 76 percent at this point last year. Following it are the deficit, called a highest priority by 50 percent; education and health care, both 43 percent; and terrorism, 42 percent.

Lower-tier issues in terms of top priorities include taxes and the war in Afghanistan, both cited by 31 percent; immigration issues, 24 percent; and global warming, 16 percent.

ELEMENTS – As noted, there seem to be three elements to Obama’s rebound in approval overall. One is the easing of criticism on the troubled economy, an issue very closely linked to presidential approval. Another is the lame-duck legislation; in an ABC News/Yahoo! News poll earlier this month, 77 percent approved.

And the third is broad support for Obama’s response to the Tucson shootings. As previously reported, 78 percent approve, including seven in 10 Republicans and conservatives. And one of Obama’s significant advances in his overall job rating in this poll is among Americans who call themselves “somewhat conservative” – a 10-point boost, to 40 percent approval.

METHODOLOGY – This ABC News/Washington Post poll was conducted by telephone Jan. 13-16, 2011, among a random national sample of 1,053 adults, including landline and cell-phone-only respondents. Results have a margin of sampling error of 3.5 points. The survey was produced for ABC News by Langer Research Associates of New York, N.Y, with sampling, data collection and tabulation by TNS of Horsham, Pa.

Analysis by Gary Langer and Julie Phelan.

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 opinion
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	
1/16/11	54	30	23	43	15	28	3
12/12/10	49	24	25	47	15	32	4
10/28/10	50	27	23	45	11	34	5
10/28/10 LV	46	31	15	52	8	44	2
10/3/10	50	26	24	47	13	34	3
9/2/10	46	24	22	52	14	38	3
7/11/10	50	28	22	47	12	35	3
6/6/10	52	30	22	45	12	33	4
4/25/10	54	31	23	44	11	33	3
3/26/10	53	34	20	43	8	35	3
2/8/10	51	29	22	46	12	33	3
1/15/10	53	30	24	44	13	32	2
12/13/09	50	31	18	46	13	33	4
11/15/09	56	32	23	42	13	29	2
10/18/09	57	33	23	40	11	29	3
9/12/09	54	35	19	43	12	31	3
8/17/09	57	35	21	40	11	29	3
7/18/09	59	38	22	37	9	28	4
6/21/09	65	36	29	31	10	22	4
4/24/09	69	42	27	26	8	18	4
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]? Do you approve/disapprove strongly or somewhat?

1/16/11 - Summary Table\*

	----- Approve -----			----- Disapprove -----			No opinion
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	
a. The economy	46	22	24	51	13	38	2
b. Health care	43	26	18	52	11	41	5
c. The situation in Afghanistan	49	19	30	41	17	24	10
d. The federal budget deficit	43	21	22	52	11	41	6
e. Taxes	50	23	27	44	14	31	6
f. held for release.							

\*Half sample asked items a-c; other half sample asked items d-f.

Trend where available:

a. The economy

	----- Approve -----			----- Disapprove -----			No opinion
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	
1/16/11	46	22	24	51	13	38	2
12/12/10	43	21	22	54	15	39	3
10/28/10 RV	44	21	23	54	15	39	3
10/28/10 LV	42	23	19	55	10	45	2
10/3/10	45	22	23	53	13	41	2
9/2/10	41	20	21	57	13	44	2
7/11/10	43	20	23	54	13	41	4
6/6/10	50	26	24	49	12	37	2
4/25/10	49	24	25	49	10	39	2

3/26/10	45	23	22	52	12	40	3
2/8/10	45	22	23	53	15	38	2
1/15/10	47	22	24	52	13	39	1
12/13/09	46	23	24	52	12	40	2
11/15/09	51	26	25	47	12	36	2
10/18/09	50	29	22	48	13	35	1
9/12/09	51	28	24	46	13	33	2
8/17/09	52	27	25	46	13	33	2
7/18/09	52	29	23	46	10	35	3
6/21/09	56	28	28	41	13	27	3
4/24/09	58	31	28	38	13	25	4
3/29/09	60	34	25	38	12	26	3
2/22/09	60	NA	NA	34	NA	NA	6

b. Health care

	----- Approve -----			----- Disapprove -----			No
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	opinion
1/16/11	43	26	18	52	11	41	5
7/11/10	45	27	19	50	10	40	5
4/25/10	49	29	20	49	9	40	1
3/26/10	48	33	15	49	6	43	3
2/8/10	43	24	19	53	11	43	3
1/15/10	44	24	21	52	9	43	4
12/13/09	44	27	18	53	10	43	3
11/15/09	47	28	19	49	8	41	3
10/18/09	48	30	18	48	10	38	4
9/12/09	48	32	15	48	10	38	4
8/17/09	46	27	19	50	8	42	5
7/18/09	49	25	24	44	11	33	7
6/21/09	53	27	26	39	10	29	9
4/24/09	57	NA	NA	29	NA	NA	13

c. The situation in Afghanistan

	----- Approve -----			----- Disapprove -----			No
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	opinion
1/16/11	49	19	30	41	17	24	10
12/12/10	45	17	28	46	16	30	10
7/11/10	45	20	25	45	14	31	10
4/25/10	56	20	36	36	16	20	7
3/26/10	53	25	29	35	15	20	12
1/15/10	50	22	28	45	18	27	6
12/13/09	52	24	28	44	13	32	4
11/15/09	45	23	23	48	16	32	6
10/18/09	45	22	23	47	17	31	7
9/12/09	55	23	33	37	17	21	7
8/17/09	60	25	35	33	14	19	7
7/18/09	62	33	29	30	13	17	8
4/24/09	63	NA	NA	26	NA	NA	11

d. The federal budget deficit

	----- Approve -----			----- Disapprove -----			No
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	opinion
1/16/11	43	21	22	52	11	41	6
12/12/10	38	16	22	55	19	36	7
9/2/10	39	18	20	58	13	45	3
7/11/10	40	20	20	56	11	45	4
6/6/10	39	22	17	56	13	42	6
4/25/10	40	20	20	55	14	42	5
3/26/10	43	22	21	52	14	38	5
2/8/10	40	17	23	56	16	40	4

1/15/10	38	18	20	56	15	41	6
12/13/09	37	16	21	56	12	44	6
11/15/09	42	19	23	53	10	43	5
10/18/09	45	20	25	51	14	37	4
9/12/09	39	17	22	55	13	42	6
8/17/09	41	19	22	53	12	41	5
7/18/09	43	19	24	49	11	38	8
6/21/09	48	22	26	48	13	35	5
4/24/09	51	NA	NA	43	NA	NA	7
3/29/09	52	NA	NA	43	NA	NA	5

e. Taxes

	----- Approve -----			----- Disapprove -----			No opinion
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	
1/16/11	50	23	27	44	14	31	6
8/17/09	51	23	28	40	12	28	8
4/24/09	56	NA	NA	38	NA	NA	6

f. held for release.

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
1/16/11	38	60	3
12/12/10	31	67	2
10/28/10 RV	27	71	2
10/28/10 LV	27	71	2
6/6/10	37	60	3
3/26/10	38	60	2
1/15/10	37	62	1
11/15/09	44	55	2
10/18/09	44	54	2
8/17/09	44	55	1
6/21/09	47	50	3
4/24/09	50	48	2
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

Call for full trend.

4. Do you approve or disapprove of the way the U.S. Congress is doing its job? Do you approve/disapprove strongly or somewhat?

	----- Approve -----			----- Disapprove -----			No opinion
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	
1/16/11	28	6	21	66	24	43	7
10/28/10 RV	23	6	17	74	21	53	3
10/28/10 LV	21	5	16	77	19	58	2
10/3/10	24	6	18	73	22	51	3
9/2/10	25	5	20	72	21	51	4



6/6/10	26	7	20	71	20	51	2
3/26/10	24	7	18	72	18	54	4
2/8/10	26	NA	NA	71	NA	NA	3
7/13/08	23			71			6
2/1/08	33			59			8
12/9/07	32			60			8
11/1/07	28			65			7
9/30/07	29			65			6
7/21/07	37			60			4
6/1/07	39	"	"	53	"	"	8
4/15/07	44	8	36	54	25	29	3
2/25/07	41	NA	NA	54	NA	NA	5
1/19/07	43			50			8

Call for full trend.

5. Do you approve or disapprove of the way John Boehner is handling his job as Speaker of the House? Do you approve/disapprove strongly or somewhat?

	----- Approve -----			----- Disapprove -----			No
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	opinion
1/16/11	39	12	28	27	14	14	33

Nancy Pelosi:

3/26/10	42	20	22	46	9	37	12
1/15/10	40	12	28	48	11	37	12
6/21/09	38	NA	NA	45	NA	NA	16
4/15/07	53			35			12
2/25/07	50			31			18
1/19/07	54			25			21

Newt Gingrich:

11/7/98*	38			58			4
7/12/98	41			44			15
5/12/98	41			44			15
1/19/98	40			52			7
4/24/97	26			62			12
3/9/97	33			61			7
9/15/96 RV	39			54			7
1/7/96	30			61			8
11/19/95	27			65			8
6/8/95	35			50			15
3/19/95	37			48			15
3/5/95	38			51			11
1/29/95	40			48			12
1/4/95	35			37			28
12/20/94**	35	"	"	43	"	"	22

\* "has handled"

\*\* "as incoming speaker"

6. Who do you trust to do a better job handling [ITEM] - (Obama) or (the Republicans in Congress)?

1/16/11 - Summary Table\*

	Obama	Reps	Both (vol.)	Neither (vol.)	No opinion
a. The economy	46	41	3	7	3
b. The federal budget deficit	44	41	4	8	2
c. The threat of terrorism	45	39	5	6	5
d. The situation in Afghanistan	52	31	4	9	4
e. Health care reform	42	42	1	10	5
f. Helping the middle class	51	37	1	8	3

g. Taxes 44 42 2 9 4  
 \*Full sample asked item a; half sample asked items b-d; other half sample asked items e-g.

Trend:

a. The economy

	Obama	Reps	Both (vol.)	Neither (vol.)	No opinion
1/16/11	46	41	3	7	3
12/12/10	44	45	2	7	2
4/25/10	49	38	1	9	2
2/8/10	47	42	1	7	2
12/13/09	48	36	1	12	3
11/15/09	52	37	1	8	1
9/12/09	48	37	1	12	2
7/18/09	56	33	1	9	2
6/21/09	55	31	2	9	2
4/24/09	61	24	2	11	2
3/29/09	58	25	1	14	2
2/22/09	61	26	1	9	3

b. The federal budget deficit

	Obama	Reps	Both (vol.)	Neither (vol.)	No opinion
1/16/11	44	41	4	8	2
12/12/10	39	47	2	9	4
4/25/10	45	41	1	10	3
2/8/10	45	43	1	9	1
9/12/09	50	36	1	12	1
7/18/09	54	35	*	9	2
6/21/09	56	30	2	9	2

c. The threat of terrorism

	Obama	Reps	Both (vol.)	Neither (vol.)	No opinion
1/16/11	45	39	5	6	5
12/12/10	41	41	4	7	7

d. The situation in Afghanistan

	Obama	Reps	Both (vol.)	Neither (vol.)	No opinion
1/16/11	52	31	4	9	4
12/12/10	41	39	3	11	6
12/13/09	47	35	1	14	4
11/15/09	46	41	1	9	3

e. Health care reform

	Obama	Reps	Both (vol.)	Neither (vol.)	No opinion
1/16/11	42	42	1	10	5
12/12/10	51	38	1	6	5
4/25/10	49	39	1	10	1
2/8/10	46	41	1	9	2
12/13/09	46	39	1	13	2
11/15/09	50	37	1	10	2
9/12/09	48	36	1	12	3
7/18/09	54	34	1	10	1
6/21/09	55	27	2	11	4

f. Helping the middle class

	Obama	Reps	Both (vol.)	Neither (vol.)	No opinion
1/16/11	51	37	1	8	3
12/12/10	53	38	1	6	2

g. Taxes

	Obama	Reps	Both (vol.)	Neither (vol.)	No opinion
1/16/11	44	42	2	9	4
12/12/10	43	44	1	7	5

7. Do you think the country should go in the direction (Obama wants to lead it), go in the direction (the Republicans in Congress want to lead it), or what?

	Obama	Republicans	Other (vol.)	Neither (vol.)	No diff. (vol.)	No opinion
1/16/11	44	35	7	8	2	4

Compare to: Bush or Democrats in Congress

	Bush	Democrats	Other (vol.)	Neither (vol.)	No diff. (vol.)	No opinion
1/19/07	25	57	4	8	2	4
1/26/06	35	51	4	5	3	2
1/16/05	45	39	3	6	2	5
12/19/01	54	28	4	9	6	0
9/9/01	41	42	4	6	1	5
7/30/01	42	43	4	6	3	3
6/3/01	40	42	5	7	3	3
4/22/01	46	36	4	6	3	4

8. For each issue I name, please tell me what kind of priority you think Obama and the Congress should give it - the highest priority, a high priority but not the highest, or a lower priority than that?

1/16/11 - Summary Table\*

	NET	----- High ----- Highest	High	Lower	None (vol.)	No opinion
a. The economy	97	72	24	3	0	*
b. The federal budget deficit	92	50	42	6	*	1
c. Education	90	43	47	9	*	*
d. Global warming	48	16	32	46	4	2
e. Health care	84	43	42	15	*	0
f. The situation in Afghanistan	81	31	50	17	1	1
g. Immigration issues	69	24	45	29	1	1
h. The U.S. campaign against terrorism	87	42	45	12	0	1
i. Taxes	87	31	56	12	*	1

\*Full sample asked item a; half sample asked b-e; other half sample asked f-i.

Trend where available (2006 and previous, "Bush and the Congress"):

a. The economy

----- High -----                      None              No

	NET	Highest	High	Lower	(vol.)	opinion
1/16/11	97	72	24	3	0	*
1/16/09	98	76	22	2	*	*
1/26/06	96	52	45	3	*	*
1/16/05	94	43	51	5	0	1
4/30/03	95	56	39	4	*	1

b. The federal budget deficit

1/16/11	92	50	42	6	*	1
1/16/09	88	48	40	11	1	*
1/26/06	88	38	50	11	0	1
1/16/05	89	32	57	9	0	1

c. Education

1/16/11	90	43	47	9	*	*
1/16/09	91	42	49	9	1	*
1/26/06	93	47	46	6	*	*
1/16/05	95	44	52	4	0	1
4/30/03	94	49	45	5	1	*

d. Global warming

1/16/11	48	16	32	46	4	2
1/16/09	58	17	41	37	4	1
1/26/06	62	26	37	35	1	1

e. Health care

1/16/11	84	43	42	15	*	0
1/16/09	90	41	49	10	*	*
1/26/06	95	53	41	5	0	*
1/16/05	94	40	54	5	*	1

f. The situation in Afghanistan

1/16/11	81	31	50	17	1	1
1/16/09	85	37	48	14	1	1

g. Immigration issues

1/16/11	69	24	45	29	1	1
1/16/09	69	21	48	29	1	1
1/26/06	69	27	42	29	2	1
1/16/05	68	20	49	28	1	2

h. The U.S. campaign against terrorism

1/16/11	87	42	45	12	0	1
1/16/09	92	50	43	6	1	1
1/26/06	93	59	34	6	*	1
1/16/05	93	52	41	6	*	1
4/30/03	93	48	45	7	0	1

i. Taxes

1/16/11	87	31	56	12	*	1
1/16/09	81	23	58	17	1	1
1/26/06	82	27	54	17	*	1
1/16/05	80	19	60	19	*	1
4/30/03	82	30	51	17	*	2

9 previously released.

10. Please tell me whether the following statement applies to Obama, or not: He understands the problems of people like you.

	Yes	No	No opinion
1/16/11	58	40	2
9/2/10	50	48	2
6/6/10	51	48	2
3/26/10	56	43	2
1/15/10	57	42	2
7/18/09	63	35	1
4/24/09	73	25	1
1/16/09	72	24	4

11. Do you have a favorable or unfavorable impression of the political movement known as the Tea Party? Do you feel that way strongly or somewhat?

	----- Favorable -----			----- Unfavorable -----			No opinion
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	
1/16/11	35	16	19	52	21	31	13
9/2/10	38	18	19	45	24	21	18
6/6/10	36	17	19	50	25	24	14
3/26/10	41	21	21	39	16	23	20
2/8/10	35	20	15	40	20	20	25

12-16 previously released.

17. On another subject, would you describe the state of the nation's economy these days as excellent, good, not so good or poor?

	----- Positive -----			----- Negative -----			No opinion
	NET	Excellent	Good	NET	Not so good	Poor	
1/16/11	13	1	12	87	45	41	*
10/28/10	9	*	9	90	41	49	1
10/28/10 LV	8	*	7	92	42	50	1
10/3/10	9	1	8	90	40	50	*
9/2/10	8	*	7	92	40	53	0
7/11/10	10	1	9	90	44	46	0
6/6/10	12	*	11	88	43	45	0
1/16/09	5	1	5	94	32	62	*
9/22/08	9	*	9	91	34	57	*
4/13/08	10	1	9	90	39	51	*
2/1/08	19	1	18	81	43	38	0

Call for full ABC/Post and ABC CCI trend.

18. Do you think Obama's economic program is making the economy (better), making it (worse) or having no real effect?

	Better	Worse	No effect	No opinion
1/16/11	35	24	39	2
9/2/10	30	33	36	1
4/25/10	39	26	32	2
1/15/10	35	23	41	2
10/18/09	41	22	35	2
8/17/09	43	23	32	2

19-36 held for release or previously released.

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