

## Obama's Poll Numbers Are Falling To Earth

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It is simply wrong for commentators to continue to focus on President Barack Obama's high levels of popularity, and to conclude that these are indicative of high levels of public confidence in the work of his administration. Indeed, a detailed look at recent survey data shows that the opposite is most likely true. The American people are coming to express increasingly significant doubts about his initiatives, and most likely support a different agenda and different policies from those that the Obama administration has advanced.

Polling data show that Mr. Obama's approval rating is dropping and is below where George W. Bush was in an analogous period in 2001. Rasmussen Reports data shows that Mr. Obama's net presidential approval rating -- which is calculated by subtracting the number who strongly disapprove from the number who strongly approve -- is just six, his lowest rating to date.

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Overall, Rasmussen Reports shows a 56%-43% approval, with a third strongly disapproving of the president's performance. This is a substantial degree of polarization so early in the administration. Mr. Obama has lost virtually all of his Republican support and a good part of his Independent support, and the trend is decidedly negative.

A detailed examination of presidential popularity after 50 days on the job similarly demonstrates a substantial drop in presidential approval relative to other elected presidents in the 20th and 21st centuries. The reason for this decline most likely has to do with doubts about the administration's policies and their impact on peoples' lives.

There is also a clear sense in the polling that taxes will increase for all Americans because of the stimulus, notwithstanding what the president has said about taxes going down for 95% of Americans. Close to three-quarters expect that government spending will grow under this administration.

Recent Gallup data echo these concerns. That polling shows that there are deep-seated, underlying economic concerns. Eighty-three percent say they are worried that the steps Mr. Obama is taking to fix the economy may not work and the economy will get worse. Eighty-two percent say they are worried about the amount of money being added to the deficit. Seventy-eight percent are worried about inflation growing, and 69% say they are worried about the increasing role of the government in the U.S. economy.

When Gallup asked whether we should be spending more or less in the economic stimulus, by close to 3-to-1 margin voters said it is better to have spent less than to have spent more. When asked whether we are adding too much to the deficit or spending too little to improve the economy, by close to a 3-to-2 margin voters said that we are adding too much to the deficit.

Support for the stimulus package is dropping from narrow majority support to below that. There is no sense that the stimulus package itself will work quickly, and according to a recent Wall Street Journal/NBC poll, close to 60% said it would make only a marginal difference in the next two to four years. Rasmussen data shows that people now actually oppose Mr. Obama's budget, 46% to 41%. Three-quarters take this position because it will lead to too much spending. And by 2-to-1, voters reject House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's call for a second stimulus package.

While over two-thirds support the plan to help homeowners refinance their mortgage, a 48%-36% plurality said that it will unfairly benefit those who have been irresponsible, echoing Rick Santelli's call to arms on CNBC.

And although a narrow majority remains confident in Mr. Obama's goals and overall direction, 45% say they do not have confidence, a number that has been growing since the inauguration less than two months ago. With three-quarters saying that they expect the economy to get worse, it is hard to see these numbers improving substantially.

There is no real appetite for increasing taxes to pay for an expanded health-insurance program. Less than half would support such an idea, which is 17% less than the percentage that supported government health insurance when Bill Clinton first considered it in March of 1993.

While voters blame Republicans for the lack of bipartisanship in Washington, the fact is that they do not believe Mr. Obama has made any progress in improving the impulse towards cooperation between the two parties. Further, nearly half of voters say that politics in Washington will be more partisan over the next year.

Fifty-six percent of Americans oppose giving bankers any additional government money or any guarantees backed by the government. Two-thirds say Wall Street will benefit more than the average taxpayer from the new bank bailout plan. This represents a jump in opposition to the first plan passed last October. At that time, 45% opposed the bailout and 30% supported it. Now a solid majority opposes the bank bailout, and 20% think it was a good idea. A majority believes that Mr. Obama will not be able to cut the deficit in half by the end of his term.

Only less than a quarter of Americans believe that the federal government truly reflects the will of the people. Almost half disagree with the idea that no one can earn a living or live "an American life" without protection and empowerment by the government, while only one-third agree.

Despite the economic stimulus that Congress just passed and the budget and financial and mortgage bailouts that Congress is now debating, just 19% of voters believe that Congress has passed any significant legislation to improve their lives. While Congress's approval has increased, it still stands at only 18%. Over two-thirds of voters believe members of Congress are more interested in helping their own careers than in helping the American people. When it comes to the nation's economic issues, two-thirds of voters have more confidence in their own judgment than they do in the average member of Congress.

Finally, what probably accounts for a good measure of the confidence and support the Obama administration has enjoyed is the fact that they are not Republicans. Virtually all Americans, more than eight in 10, blame Republicans for the current economic woes, and the only two leaders with lower approval ratings than Harry Reid and Nancy Pelosi are Republican leaders Mitch McConnell and John Boehner.

All of this is not just a subject for pollsters and analysts to debate. It shows fundamentally that public confidence in government remains low and is slipping. We face the possibility of substantial gridlock along with an absolute absence of public confidence that could come to mirror the lack of confidence in the American economy that the Dow and the S&P are currently showing.

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