How Americans View the Federal Government’s Role

Gallup and USA Today
October 13, 2010
The Gallup Building
Washington, DC
The “Federal Government” Has An Image Problem
Americans’ Overall View of the “Federal Government”

- Negative: 33% Somewhat, 25% Very
- Neutral: 14%
- Positive: 22%

2010 Aug
### Americans’ View of Business Industry Sectors

#### Percent positive minus percent negative

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>Percent Positive minus Percent Negative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Computer industry</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restaurant industry</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel industry</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail industry</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accounting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publishing industry</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephone industry</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Television and radio industry</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Automobile industry</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electric and gas utilities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Airline industry</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pharmaceutical industry</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Real estate industry</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Healthcare industry</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banking</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The federal government</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oil and gas industry</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**2010 Aug 5-8**
Satisfaction With the Way the Nation is Being Governed

Satisfied

Dissatisfied
Do You Think the Federal Government Today Has Too Much Power?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>% Yes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2002 Sep 5-8</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003 Sep 8-10</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004 Sep 13-15</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005 Sep 12-15</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006 Sep 7-10</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007 Sep 14-16</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008 Sep 11-17</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009 Mar 5-8</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009 Aug 31-Sep 2</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010 Sep 13-16</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Do you think the federal government poses an immediate threat to the rights and freedoms of ordinary citizens, or not?

% Yes, immediate threat

- 2003 Sep 8-10: 30%
- 2004 Sep 13-15: 35%
- 2005 Sep 12-15: 37%
- 2006 Sep 7-10: 44%
- 2010 Sep 13-16: 46%
The Role of the Federal Government Is A Substantive and Symbolic Pivot Point in American Politics
Americans’ Views of “The Federal Government”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Net Negative</th>
<th>Net Positive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conservatives</td>
<td>-67%</td>
<td>+23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republicans</td>
<td>-70%</td>
<td>+17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disapprove/Obama</td>
<td>-75%</td>
<td>+15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2010 Aug
Do you think the federal government poses an immediate threat to the rights and freedoms of ordinary citizens, or not?

- Tea Party supporters: 76%
- Republicans: 66%
- Conservatives: 64%
- Disapprove Obama: 63%
- Liberals: 31%
- Approve Obama: 25%
- Democrats: 21%
And Yet.....Caveats
Caveat I: Americans Are Not as Negative as Residents of Other Democracies Around the World
Do You Have Confidence in Your National Government?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>% Yes 2009-2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Korea</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Caveat II: Views of Government Vary Based on Time Period, Political Environment, Political Segments
Americans’ Views of “The Federal Government”

2003

Democrats: -21
Independents: 3
Republicans: +37

2010

Democrats: +16
Independents: -39
Republicans: -69

Net Positive
Net Negative
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Democrats</th>
<th>Independents</th>
<th>Republicans</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
On a 1 to 5 Scale, What Americans Want Government To Do

1 - Government only does those things necessary to provide most basic government functions: 18%
2 - Government takes active steps in every area it can to improve lives of its citizens: 15%
3 - Government takes active steps in every area it can to improve lives of its citizens: 33%
4 - Government takes active steps in every area it can to improve lives of its citizens: 15%
5 - Government takes active steps in every area it can to improve lives of its citizens: 19%
In general, businesses can do things more efficiently than the government.

There are some functions, such as building roads or funding research, the government needs to pay for because there are no incentives for private institutions to do so.
On a 1 to 5 scale, how much responsibility you think the government should have for each of these?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2010 Sep 13-16</th>
<th>% Total Responsibility (5)</th>
<th>% No Responsibility (1)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Protecting Americans from foreign threats</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protecting consumers against unsafe products</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preventing discrimination</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protecting the environment from human actions that can harm it</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making sure that all Americans have adequate health care</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
On a 1 to 5 scale, how much responsibility you think the government should have for each of these?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2010 Sep 13-16</th>
<th>% Total Responsibility (5)</th>
<th>% No Responsibility (1)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Developing and maintaining the nation's transportation systems</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making sure that all those who want jobs have them</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing a minimum standard of living for all</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upholding moral standards among its citizens</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reducing income differences between the rich and the poor</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protecting major U.S. corporations that are in danger of going out of business</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Caveat IV: In Fact, No Monolithic Structure of Attitudes, but Instead a Wide Diversity
Five Groups of Americans

Obama liberals
(24%)
Most heavily Democratic, highest number of liberals, least religious, majority female

Keep it small (22%)
Highest percentage of males, Republicans, conservatives, non-Hispanic whites, most affluent, oldest

Mushy middle (17%)
Highest education levels, most independents

The bigger, the better (20%)
Majority female, highest percentage of non-whites, never-been-marrieds

Morality first (17%)
Most religious. Majority are 50 or older, Republican, conservative
Federal Government Responsibility for “Upholding Moral Standards”

- No responsibility (1, 2): Keep it small (88%), Mushy middle (50%), The bigger, the better (89%), Morality first (100%), Obama liberals (56%)
- Moderate responsibility (3): Keep it small (12%), Mushy middle (50%), The bigger, the better (11%), Morality first (0%), Obama liberals (44%)
- Total responsibility (4, 5): Keep it small (0%), Mushy middle (0%), The bigger, the better (0%), Morality first (0%), Obama liberals (0%)
Federal Government Responsibility for “Reducing Income Differences”

- **No responsibility (1, 2)**: 98%
- **Moderate responsibility (3)**: 88%
- **Total responsibility (4, 5)**: 70%

- **Keep it small**: 2%
- **Mushy middle**: 0%
- **The bigger, the better**: 12%
- **Morality first**: 30%
- **Obama liberals**: 51%
Federal Government Responsibility for “Protecting Americans from Foreign Threats”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approach</th>
<th>No responsibility (1, 2)</th>
<th>Moderate responsibility (3)</th>
<th>Total responsibility (4, 5)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Keep it small</td>
<td>3% 3%</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mushy middle</td>
<td>1% 5%</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The bigger, the better</td>
<td>1% 2%</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morality first</td>
<td>4% 2%</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obama liberals</td>
<td>4% 6%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Federal Government Responsibility for: “Making Sure All Americans Have Adequate Healthcare”

- Keep it small: 80% No responsibility, 11% Moderate responsibility, 10% Total responsibility
- Mushy middle: 36% No responsibility, 21% Moderate responsibility, 40% Total responsibility
- The bigger, the better: 6% No responsibility, 7% Moderate responsibility, 87% Total responsibility
- Morality first: 35% No responsibility, 21% Moderate responsibility, 44% Total responsibility
- Obama liberals: 8% No responsibility, 12% Moderate responsibility, 79% Total responsibility
Federal Government Responsibility for “Providing a Minimum Standard of Living For All”

No responsibility (1, 2)  Moderate responsibility (3)  Total responsibility (4, 5)

- Keep it small: 83% 10% 5%
- Mushy middle: 46% 33% 21%
- The bigger, the better: 9% 12% 79%
- Morality first: 35% 28% 36%
- Obama liberals: 10% 28% 62%
Federal Government Responsibility for: “Developing, Maintaining National Transportation System”

No responsibility (1, 2)  Moderate responsibility (3)  Total responsibility (4, 5)

- Keep it small: 34% (No responsibility), 9% (Mushy middle), 5% (The bigger, the better), 13% (Morality first), 5% (Obama liberals)
- Mushy middle: 28% (No responsibility), 31% (Mushy middle), 19% (The bigger, the better), 20% (Morality first), 19% (Obama liberals)
- The bigger, the better: 36% (No responsibility), 61% (Mushy middle), 76% (The bigger, the better), 66% (Morality first), 75% (Obama liberals)
- Morality first: 19% (No responsibility), 19% (Mushy middle), 19% (The bigger, the better), 20% (Morality first), 75% (Obama liberals)
- Obama liberals: 7% (No responsibility), 20% (Mushy middle), 19% (The bigger, the better), 19% (Morality first), 19% (Obama liberals)
Federal Government Responsibility for “Protecting Major U.S. Corporations in Danger of Going Out of Business”

- **Keep it small**: 93% No responsibility, 1% Moderate responsibility, 5% Total responsibility
- **Mushy middle**: 71% No responsibility, 24% Moderate responsibility, 5% Total responsibility
- **The bigger, the better**: 26% No responsibility, 32% Moderate responsibility, 42% Total responsibility
- **Morality first**: 57% No responsibility, 22% Moderate responsibility, 22% Total responsibility
- **Obama liberals**: 51% No responsibility, 34% Moderate responsibility, 16% Total responsibility
Caveat V: Yes, Americans Can Name Things They Think the Government Should **Not** be Doing, but They Also Can Name Things They Think the Government **Should** Be Doing
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Mentions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Healthcare legislation</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spending too much</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wars in Iraq/Afghanistan</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raising taxes/Not extending tax cuts</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bailouts of large corporations</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too involved in business affairs</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involved in other country’s affairs</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting involved in matters of .</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigration/illegal immigrants</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2010 Sep 13-16
Can you please give me an example of something the federal government is currently NOT doing that you think it SHOULD be doing?

- Creating jobs: 15
- Securing the borders/immigration: 13
- Focus more on people’s problems: 12
- Improve the economy: 6
- Balance the budget/Limit spending: 6
- Bring troops home: 5
- Make infrastructure improvements: 4
- Expand healthcare coverage: 4
- Cut taxes: 4
- Improve education: 4

% Mentions, Open-end question

2010 Sep 13-16
So, what have we learned so far?

- Like the cable company – bad image, but necessary service
- Americans largely dissatisfied with government today, and want changes in process
- But – widely varying support for government taking an active role in addressing most problems
- And some dissatisfaction has to do with federal inaction, not just too much action
So, what have we learned so far?

So, what is to be done?

1. Recognize, regardless of who is in power, that Americans neither want no government nor total government.

2. Next Congress, be it Republican or Democrat, needs to consider tacking toward the middle.

3. If Republicans win control of Congress, could be at risk of overstepping, politically, just as Obama and the Democrats may have overstepped in the past two years in the other direction.
So, what have we learned so far?

4. Fix the federal government’s brand image
5. Decide on how to improve process of providing services
From the People’s Perspective: What Can Be Done?
Ask the American Public Directly
What is the One Thing You Would Recommend to Fix the Federal Government (Open-End)?

- Fire all elected officials and start over
- Cut spending/Control the deficit
- Work together/More bipartisanship
- Need more honest/reliable candidates
- Create more jobs/Keep jobs in U.S.
- Smaller government
- Impeach the president and elect a new one
- Term limits
- Improve public awareness about voting/government
- Less government involvement/control
- Stop raising taxes/Lower taxes
- Take care of people at home/Stop worrying about other countries
- Follow the constitution
What is the One Thing You Would Recommend to Fix the Federal Government (Open-End)?

- Fire all elected officials and start over
- Work together/More bipartisanship
- Need more honest/reliable candidates
- Impeach the president and elect a new one
- Term limits
- Improve public awareness about voting/government
From the People’s Perspective: What Can Be Done?
*Fix the Federal Government’s Image Problem*
What’s Behind the Image Problem?

**TAXES:** Spending too much of the people’s money

**INTRUSIVE:** Taking away rights, interfering with business, economy

**BUREAUCRACY:** Inefficient, corrupt

**PROCESS:** Not representative, ignores people, Congress doesn’t work

**SPECIFIC LEGISLATION:** Actions viewed as wrong
From the People’s Perspective: What Can Be Done?

Reduce Inefficiency
Examples of Top-of-Mind Association With Words “Federal Government”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A mess</th>
<th>Needs help</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bloated</td>
<td>Oversized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broken</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chaos</td>
<td>Slow moving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dysfunctional</td>
<td>Terrible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disorganized</td>
<td>Too big</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gridlock</td>
<td>Too big, large &amp; inefficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incompetent</td>
<td>Unorganized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ineffective</td>
<td>Wasteful</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
From the People’s Perspective: What Can Be Done?
*Get the People More Involved*
American People Hire High-Powered Lobbyist To Push Interests In Congress

WASHINGTON—Citing a desire to gain influence in Washington, the American people confirmed Friday that they have hired high-powered D.C. lobbyist Jack Weldon of the firm Patton Boggs to help advance their agenda in Congress.
Trust in Elected Representatives Versus People Themselves

The men and women who hold or are running for public office

Great Deal/Fair Amount of Trust

47%

The American people as a whole to make judgments under our democratic system about the issues facing our country

69%

2010 Sep 13-16
Expected impact of a “national referendum system in which all citizens voted on proposals that deal with major national issues, before they became law”

- Make things better: 56%
- Not make much difference: 22%
- Make things worse: 18%

\textit{Washington Post/Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard University Survey  September 22- October 3, 2010}
From the People’s Perspective: What Can Be Done? 
*Fix the Way Congress Works*
Trust and Confidence in the Legislative Branch, consisting of the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives

% Great deal/Fair amount

- 2001 Sep 7-10: 65
- 2002 Sep 5-8: 67
- 2003 Sep 8-10: 63
- 2004 Sep 13-15: 60
- 2005 Sep 12-15: 62
- 2006 Sep 7-10: 56
- 2007 Sep 14-16: 50
- 2008 Sep 8-11: 47
- 2009 Sep 1-3: 45
- 2010 Sep 13-16: 36
Trust and Confidence in Federal Government to Handle Domestic Problems

% Great deal/Fair amount

- 2001 Sep 7: 60
- 2001 Oct 11: 77
- 2002 Jun 17: 71
- 2002 Sep 5: 71
- 2003 Feb 3: 67
- 2003 Sep 8: 63
- 2003 Jul 18: 63
- 2004 Feb 9: 64
- 2004 Sep 12: 58
- 2004 Sep 13: 59
- 2005 Feb 7: 61
- 2005 Sep 12: 56
- 2005 Sep 13: 53
- 2006 Sep 10: 52
- 2006 Sep 7: 52
- 2007 Feb 1: 47
- 2007 Sep 8: 48
- 2008 Aug 31: 51
- 2010 Sep 13: 46
Rate the Honesty and Ethics of These Professions

- Nurses: 83%
- Police Officers: 63%
- Lawyers: 13%
- Business Executives: 12%
- Senators: 11%
- Members of Congress: 9%
- Car Salespeople: 6%

% Very High or High Honesty and Ethics

Nov 2009
From the People’s Perspective: What Can Be Done? 
*Experts Weigh In*
Questions, Answers and Discussion
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