

# AEI Political Report

## How Are We Doing?

We devote the bulk of this issue of Political Report to attitudes about health care reform, but we begin with a not unrelated issue: how Americans are feeling about the economy. There has been some improvement in their views about the economy's overall health since January, but attitudes are still quite negative. Most Americans don't expect to lose their jobs, but they are cutting back and watching their spending closely. Thirty-six percent say they are cutting back because they have had to, but 50 percent say they are doing so because they think things might get worse in the future.

Q: Which of the following statements . . . ?

	Comes closest to my view
The economy is starting to recover from the problems it faced in the past year or so	12%
The economic recovery has not started but conditions have stabilized and are not getting any worse	48
The economy is still in a downturn and conditions are continuing to worsen	40

Source: CNN/Opinion Research Corporation, June 2009.

Q: Are you hearing . . . ?

	Hearing about the economy	
	July 2009	January 2009
Mostly bad news these days	41%	67%
Mix of good and bad	56	30
Mostly good news	3	2

Source: Pew Research Center, latest that of July 2009.

Q: Please tell me whether you are . . . ?

Very confident that my current employer will not have to lay me off in the next six months	60%
Somewhat confident	23
Not too confident	8
Not confident at all	7

Note: The responses for whites were 65, 21, 7, and 5 percent, respectively. For blacks they were 54, 24, 18 and 2 percent. Source: CNN/Essence/Opinion Research Corporation, May 2009.

Q: You mentioned making some cutbacks in spending. Have you been . . . ?

Have been cutting back because	
My financial situation has gotten worse and made such cutbacks necessary	36%
I worry that it might get worse in the future	50
Both/other	1

Note: Asked of those who said they had changed their spending habits = 87 percent of the sample. Source: Pew Research Center, June 2009.

Q: Do you agree or disagree . . . ? Q: At this time, are you . . . ? Q: Are you feeling . . . ? Q: Do you . . . ?

	National	Monthly income	
		< \$2,000	\$7,500 or more
I am watching my spending very closely	88%	93%	81%
I have enough money to buy the things I need	78	51	95
I am cutting back on how much I spend each week	71	74	60
I am feeling pretty good these days about the money I have to spend	56	43	64

Note: Income is monthly income. Source: The Gallup Organization, June 8-27, 2009.

## President Obama and the Economy

Q: Do you . . . ?

### Approve of the way President Obama is handling the economy



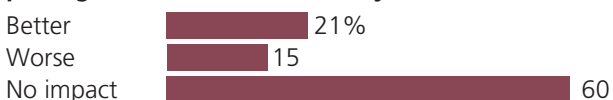
Note: In the July poll, 66 percent of Democrats, 46 percent of independents, and 24 percent of Republicans approved of the way the president is handling the economy.

Source: CBS News, July 2009.

Q: So far, do you think . . . ?

Q: In the long run, do you think . . . ?

### So far, the federal government's stimulus package has made the economy



### In the long run, the federal government's stimulus package will make the economy



Note: Majorities of Democrats (64 percent), independents (57 percent) and Republicans (59 percent) said the stimulus had had no impact so far. Sixty percent of Democrats said it would make the economy better in the long run; 38 percent of independents and 20 percent of Republicans gave that response. Six percent of Democrats said it would make the economy worse in the long run; 24 percent of independents and 40 percent of Republicans gave that response.

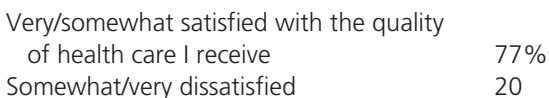
Source: CBS News, July 2009.

## Health Care Concerns

Polls indicate that the economy is today's top problem, but health care is a perennial concern. So, what do Americans think should be done? Publics assert general values; they rarely provide specific legislative guidance. On general values, the polls are remarkably consistent. Americans believe that the federal government has some responsibility to help provide care for those who aren't able to provide it for themselves. On specifics such as the best way to cover the uninsured, how much people are willing to pay, or whether a new approach should include a public option, poll results are unreliable.

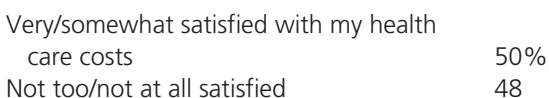
In the following pages, we report on what people say about their health care, how the recession has affected their concerns about it, how broken they think the system is, how we should pay for changes, and what worries them most about reform.

Q: What about the health care you receive? Are you . . . ?



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

Q: Are you . . . ?



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

Q: For each specific item I name, please tell me whether you are . . . ?

	2009	1994
<b>Very/somewhat satisfied with . . .</b>		
The quality of the health care I receive	83%	82%
My health insurance coverage*	81	84
My health care costs, including both expenses not covered by insurance and the cost of your insurance	55	61**

Note: \*Question asked of those with insurance. The wording in 1994 was "excellent/good." \*\*In 1994, the question asked about "your health care costs, including insurance."

Source: ABC News/*Washington Post*, latest that of June 2009.

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## Paying Health Care Bills

Around a quarter of Americans in most polls report having had problems paying medical bills. In Kaiser's June poll, 19 percent said they had problems paying medical bills as a result of the downturn and that this was serious; 6 percent said they had problems and it wasn't serious. Around 15 percent say they have lost their health insurance. More people know someone whose employer has cut back benefits or made employees pay more.

*Q: Have you or your family experienced any of the following problems as a result of the economic downturn, or not? If yes, ask: Was this a serious problem or not?*

	Experienced this problem as a result of the economic downturn	
	It was serious	It was not serious
Had problems getting a good-paying job or a raise in pay	24%	13%
Lost money in the stock market	23	21
Had work hours cut or had to take a pay cut	23	11
Had problems paying your rent or mortgage	19	9
<b>Had any problems paying medical bills</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>6</b>
Had problems paying for gas	18	14
Had problems with credit card debt or other personal debt	18	11
Lost a job	17	5
Had problems paying for food	13	10
<b>Lost health insurance coverage</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>4</b>
Delayed retirement or returned to work	7	7

Source: Kaiser Family Foundation, June 2009.

*Q: In the last 12 months, have you or someone in your household . . . ?*

Not gotten a test, treatment or procedure that your doctor recommended because your health plan wouldn't cover it	21%
Had to cut back on or stopped taking a medication because you could not afford to pay for it	25

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

*Q: In the past 12 months, [did/have] you or another family member living in your household . . . ?*

Had any problems paying medical bills	26%
Put off or postponed getting health care you needed	31
Skipped a recommended medical test or treatment	27
Not filled a prescription for a medicine	26
Cut pills in half or skipped doses of medicine	19

Source: Kaiser Family Foundation, June 2009.

*Q: As I read from a list, please tell me whether each is a . . . ?*

Major problem for me and my family	
Paying for the cost of health insurance	43%
Your employer making you pay a larger share of your health insurance costs	35
Paying for the costs of routine medical care	34*
Paying for the costs of prescription drugs	34
The quality of medical care in your community	24
The availability of medical care in your community	21

Note: \*In 1993, 40 percent said this was a major problem.  
Source: Pew Research Center, June 2009.

*Q: In recent years, has the employer of you or anyone in your household cut back on health care benefits or made the wage earner pay more for those benefits?*

Yes, cut back	44%
Has not	50

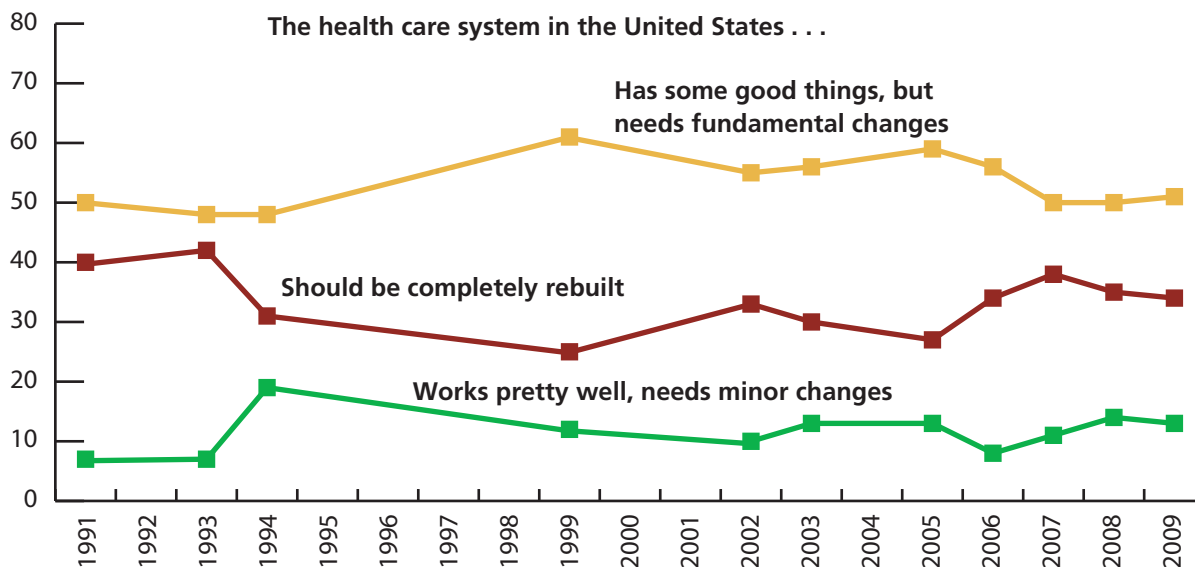
Source: CBS News/*New York Times*, June 2009.

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## Ready for Change?

Very few think the health care system is working well and needs only minor changes. In CBS News/*New York Times* polls, around a third say it should be completely rebuilt, down from around 40 percent in the early 1990s. In Pew's question, four in ten say it should be completely rebuilt, down from 55 percent in 1993.

Q. Which of the following three statements comes closest to expressing your overall view of the health care system in the United States? 1. On the whole, the health care system works pretty well and only minor changes are necessary to make it work better. 2. There are some good things in our health care system, but fundamental changes are needed. 3. Our health care system has so much wrong with it that we need to completely rebuild it.



Note: If the question was asked more than once in a year, we show the last asking that year.  
Source: CBS News/*New York Times*, latest that of June 2009.

Q: Do you think the country's health care system . . . ?



Source: CNN/Opinion Research Corporation, June 2009.

Q: Do you think the health care system in this country . . . ?



Note: In 1993, 55 percent told Pew it needed to be completely rebuilt.  
Source: Pew Research Center, June 2009.

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## Competing Goals?

Americans think keeping health care costs down and providing insurance for people who don't have it are both important goals. When pollsters ask them to choose between the two, as many pollsters have done, we often get conflicting results. The CBS News/*New York Times* and Pew questions below focus on serious problems and goals for the nation, and people tilt toward coverage for the uninsured. The Quinnipiac and NBC/*Wall Street Journal* questions focus on the legislative action, and the responses are quite different. Covering the uninsured is clearly a goal Americans support, but it does not trump all other considerations.

Q: If you had to say, which do you think is a . . . ?

### More serious problem right now

Keeping health care costs down for average Americans	26%
Providing health insurance for Americans who do not have any insurance	65

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

Q: Which do you think is a . . . ?

### More important goal for the nation

To limit the overall annual increase in health care costs	36%
To change the system so that all Americans are guaranteed access to all medically necessary care	56

Source: Pew Research Center, June 2009.

Q: Which do you think is . . . ?

### More important goal for health care legislation

Reducing health care costs	54%
Covering those who don't have health insurance	38

Source: Quinnipiac University, June 2009.

Q: Which one of the following do you think . . . ?

### The president and Congress should be most focused on

Addressing the cost of health care	41%
People who are not covered by insurance	43

Note: In a follow-up question, 64 percent said they thought the president's health care plan was most focused on people who are not covered; 18 percent said it was most focused on cost.

Source: NBC/*Wall Street Journal*, June 2009.

## How Much Will It Cost?

Questions about willingness to pay for various government activities are extremely difficult to evaluate. The questions are abstractions, and they are often asked in isolation. Would people be willing to pay \$500 or more a year to cover the uninsured when their gasoline or home heating or property tax bills are also rising? Slight changes in wording can pull people in different directions when questions are hypothetical. The CBS News/*New York Times* question and the Kaiser Family Foundation questions shown here were both asked in June, yet they produce very different responses.

When asked about how we should pay for expanding health care coverage, large numbers recoil from paying more themselves. They favor raising taxes on those making more than \$250,000.

Q: Would you be . . . ?

Willing to pay higher taxes so that all Americans have health insurance that they can't lose no matter what	57%
Not willing	37

Note: In a follow-up question of those who said they would be willing to pay more, 43 percent of the 57 percent said they would be willing to pay as much as \$500 a year more.

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

Q: Would you be . . . ?

Would be willing to pay more either in higher health insurance premiums or higher taxes in order to increase the number of Americans who have health insurance	41%
Would not	54

Source: Kaiser Family Foundation, June 2009.

Q: Would you be . . . ?

Willing to pay more in taxes for a health care overhaul plan that reduces health care costs and covers those who don't have health insurance	49%
Unwilling	45

Source: Quinnipiac University, June 2009.

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Q: Experts currently estimate that this proposed health care plan will cost one trillion dollars over the next decade. I am going to read you some proposals for how the plan could be funded. After I read each statement, please tell me whether the proposal is . . . ?

	Acceptable	Not acceptable
Raise taxes for people with incomes over \$250,000	62%	33%
Require people with expensive health plans with more generous benefits than a standard plan to pay taxes on a portion of that plan's cost	33	59
Require all people to pay taxes on the cost of their private health insurance plans	23	70

Source: NBC News/Wall Street Journal, June 2009.

Q: Please tell me if you would favor or oppose each of the following to help pay for health care reform and provide coverage for more of the uninsured.

	Favor	Oppose
Increasing income taxes for all those who pay them	29%	67%
Increasing income taxes for people from families making more than \$250,000 a year	68%	30%

Source: Kaiser Family Foundation, June 2009.

Q: Would you . . . ?

Support a new tax on employees for the health care benefits that they receive from their employers	30%
Oppose	63

Source: Quinnipiac University, June 2009.

Q: Do you . . . ?

Favor changing the law so that workers with the most generous health care benefits would pay taxes on the money their employer puts toward their coverage	40%
Oppose	54

Source: Kaiser Family Foundation, June 2009.

Q: Would you . . . ?

Support a federal tax on health insurance benefits people receive through their employer if those benefits cost more than \$17,000 a year	24%
Oppose	70

Source: ABC News/Washington Post, June 2009.

Q: If a health care overhaul plan . . . , would you . . . ?

Support a plan that lowered your health care costs and insured all Americans, but limited your choice of doctor, hospital or treatment	30%
Oppose it	66

Support a plan that lowered your health care costs and allowed your choice of any doctor, hospital or treatment you wanted, but did not insure all Americans	44%
Oppose it	48

Support a plan that allowed your choice of any doctor, hospital or treatment you wanted and insured all Americans, but did not lower your health care costs	59%
Oppose it	35

Source: Quinnipiac University, June 2009.

Q: From what you know of the health care reforms which the administration is working on, do you think the . . . ?

Amount I pay would increase	54%
Decrease	17
Remain the same	26

Source: CNN/Opinion Research Corporation, June 2009.

## What Happens Next?

People are concerned that efforts to reform the health care system will raise their costs and reduce the quality of their care. Their views appear muddled on how reform would affect them.

Q: How concerned are you, if at all, that current efforts to reform the health care system will . . . ?

	Very concerned	Somewhat
Increase my health care costs	62%	22%
Reduce the quality of health care I receive	58	23
Limit your choices of doctors or treatments	56	23
Sharply increase the federal deficit	56	28
Increase government bureaucracy in the health care system	51	27

Source: ABC News/Washington Post, June 2009.

Q: How concerned are you that if the government creates a system of providing health care for all Americans . . .

	The quality of my own health care will get worse	My own access to medical tests and treatment would become limited	I would be required to change doctors
Very/somewhat concerned	63%	68%	53%

Note: In the June CNN/ORC poll, 65 percent said that under the health care reforms the administration is working on, they would be able to receive care from the same doctors. Thirty-one percent said they would not.

Source: CBS News/New York Times, June 2009.

Q: From what you know of those health care reforms, do you think . . . ?

I and my family would be better off	20%
Worse off	35
About the same	44

Source: CNN/Opinion Research Corporation, June 2009.

Q: Just your best guess, if the health care system is changed, do you think the quality of your health care will . . . ?

Get better	16%
Get worse	31
Remain about the same	50

Note: Twelve percent of those with insurance said the quality of their care would get better; 37 percent of those without insurance thought it would improve.

Source: ABC News/Washington Post, June 2009.

Q: Do you think you and your family would be . . . ?

Better off if the President and Congress passed health care reform	39%
Worse off	16
Wouldn't make much difference	36

Note: In this survey, 57 percent said the country as a whole would be better off, 16 percent worse off, and 19 percent said it wouldn't make much difference.

Source: Kaiser Family Foundation, June 2009.



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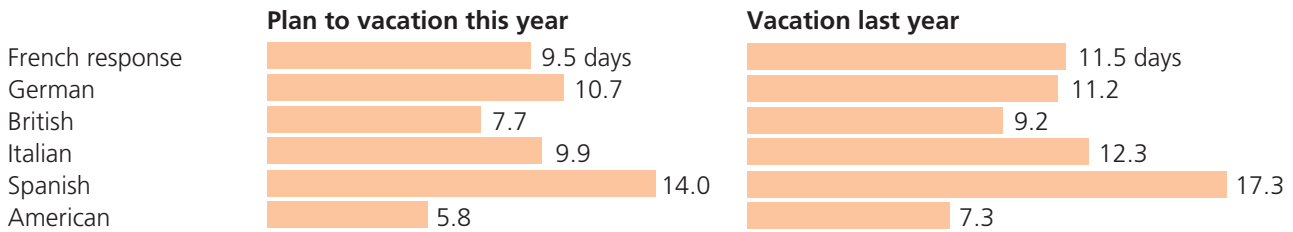
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# Public Opinion Potpourri

## Vacation Time

Q: How long do you think you will go on vacation this summer?

Q: How long did you go on vacation last summer?

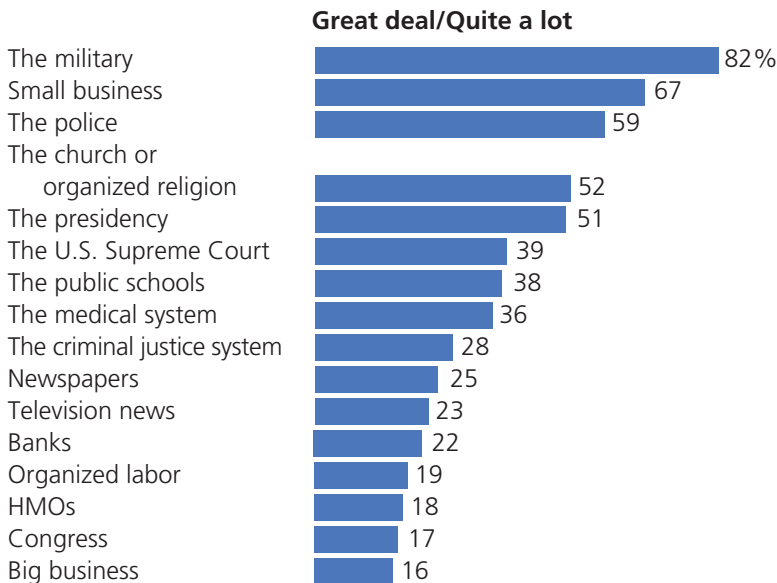


Source: Harris Interactive, *International Herald Tribune*, France 24, May–June, 2009.

## Confidence in Our Institutions

Americans' faith in the country's institutions varies greatly today. The gap between Americans' confidence in small business and in big business has never been so large—there is currently a 51-point confidence gap between these two institutions. Confidence in security institutions such as the U.S. military and the police remains quite high, but confidence in financial institutions is low. Only about one in five Americans say they have to have a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in banks.

Q: How much confidence do you have in each one?



Source: The Gallup Organization, June 2009.

## Confidence in Government on Terrorism Remains High

Q: How much confidence do you have in the . . . ?

Great deal/fair amount of confidence in the U.S. government to protect its citizens from future acts of terrorism 73%

Note: In September 2002, 80 percent had a great deal or fair amount of confidence in the government to protect its citizens from future terrorist attacks.

Q: Now we would like you to think more generally about the security measures put in place after September 11 that were aimed at preventing terrorist attacks. Which comes closer to your view . . . ?

In general these security measures are still needed 83%  
Many of these security measures could now be dropped 14

Source: Gallup/USA Today, June 2009.