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## Three in Five Adults Give President-Elect Obama Positive Marks for Transition Handling

*Three in five Americans say Economy is most important issue to address and only one in five believe the country is going in the right direction now*

**ROCHESTER, N.Y. – January 15, 2009** – As Barack Obama's readies his inauguration speech for next week, three in five adults (60%) give the job he has done so far in choosing his Cabinet and preparing to be president positive ratings. However, three in ten Americans (29%), and almost six in ten Republicans (58%), give him negative ratings and one in ten (10%) are not sure. In comparison, as George W. Bush was preparing to take office in January of 2001, just half of Americans (49%) gave the job he had done choosing Cabinet officials and preparing to be president a positive rating, while 39% gave it a negative one.

Additionally, these are some of the findings of *The Harris Poll*®, a new nationwide survey of 1,019 U.S. adults surveyed by telephone between January 7 and 11, 2009 by Harris Interactive®:

- While Democrats give President-elect Obama high marks for the transition (82% positive), not surprisingly only 30% of Republicans do the same;
- Over four in five African Americans (85%) also give the President-elect positive ratings on the transition as do over two-thirds of Hispanics (69%) and just over half (55%) of Whites;
- Looking at what the new President will have to deal with, just one in five Americans (19%) think things in the country are going in the right direction while 72% believe things are going off on the wrong track. One bright spot for the new administration is that this is up from October, right before the Election when just 11% of Americans thought the country was moving in the right direction;
- The reasons for things in the country not moving in the right direction is clear and this is one of the more pressing things for the Obama Administration. Three in five Americans (59%) think the economy is one of the two most important issues for the government to address. Also, one in five adults (20%) say employment is one of the most important issues, a sharp rise from the 5% who named this issue in October. In fact, over the past twelve years, this is the highest number that have said employment is a most important issue; and,
- Health care continues to be a concern to Americans (16% cite it as a most important issue) but it is definitely much further down than the economy. Also, 15% of Americans say the war is a most important issue to address while 6% say budget and government spending is a most important issue.

**So What?**

Barack Obama continues to ride a swell of positive feeling into the White House, but the fact that the number of people who give him high marks is not higher, should be slightly concerning to the new Administration. Even after a contentious recount, Supreme Court decisions and an election that was essentially tied, half of Americans still gave George W. Bush high marks as he prepared to take the oath of office in 2001. Now many other issues have caused people to not be as upbeat at this time of change as they might have been.

One thing is that, even after all the reaching out to Republicans and Conservatives that the President-elect has done, partisanship is alive and well. Another is that the issues which are on the minds of Americans have moved attitudes greatly. During the early days of the campaign, especially during the primaries, much was made about what would be done with the troops in Iraq. Now, concerns about paying bills, keeping or finding a job, not losing retirement funds, shrinking investments, and other economic concerns is definitely weighing on the minds of the American public. And, it is these concerns that Barack Obama is supposed to address quickly after taking the oath of office. If people thought their economic worries might be diminishing in the near future, the odds are that President-elect Obama would be getting even higher marks for his transition.

**TABLE 1  
PRESIDENT-ELECT OBAMA'S JOB RATING**

“How would you rate the job President-elect Barack Obama is doing in choosing his Cabinet and preparing to be president – excellent, pretty good, only fair, or poor?”

Base: All adults

	Total	Race/Ethnicity			Political Party		
		White	Black	Hispanic	Rep.	Dem.	Ind.
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
POSITIVE	60	55	85	69	30	82	61
Excellent	20	15	46	26	5	31	21
Pretty good	40	40	39	43	25	52	40
NEGATIVE	29	35	10	15	58	10	31
Only fair	19	23	9	10	34	8	21
Poor	10	12	1	5	24	2	10
Not sure	10	10	5	16	12	8	8

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

**TABLE 2**  
**RIGHT DIRECTION OR WRONG TRACK**

*No Opinion's, Not Sure's and Decline to Answer's Excluded*

"Generally speaking, would you say things in the country are going in the right direction or have they pretty seriously gotten off on the wrong track?"

Base: All adults

	TREND	Right Direction	Wrong Track
		%	%
2009	January	19	72
2008	October	11	83
	September	16	77
	August	18	76
	June	14	80
	April	15	75
	February	23	69
2007	December	18	74
	October	22	67
	July	19	70
	February	29	62
2006	May	24	69
	February	32	59
2005	November	27	68
	January	46	48
2004	September	38	57
	June	35	59
2003	December	35	57
	June	44	51
2002	December	36	57
	June	46	48
2001	December	65	32
	June	43	52
2000	October	50	41
	June	40	51
1999	June	37	55
	March	47	45
1998	December	43	51
	June	48	44
1997	December	39	56
	April	36	55
1996	December	38	50
	June	29	64
1995	December	26	62
	June	24	65
1994	December	29	63
	June	28	65
1993	June	21	70
	March	39	50
1992	June	12	81
	January	20	75
1991	December	17	75
	January	58	32
1990	October	20	73
	February	48	43

**TABLE 3**  
**MOST IMPORTANT ISSUES FOR GOVERNMENT TO ADDRESS**

“What do you think are the two most important issues for the government to address?”

*Spontaneous, unprompted replies*

Base: All Adults

	'97	'98	'99	'00	'01	'02	'03	'04	'05	'06	07	08	08	08	08	09
	May	Jan	Feb	Aug	Dec	Dec	June	Oct	Aug	June	Oct	Feb	Apr	Sept	Oct	Jan
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
The economy (non-specific)	8	9	7	5	32	34	25	28	19	14	13	41	47	54	64	59
Employment/jobs	5	3	4	4	7	8	8	10	3	7	5	6	9	9	5	20
Healthcare (not Medicare)	10	11	12	15	5	10	14	18	11	12	25	22	17	21	22	16
(The) war	X	X	X	X	12	18	8	35	41	27	24	26	28	17	14	15
Budget/Government spending	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	5	6	5	2	3	2	6
Education	15	14	21	25	12	11	13	7	8	7	6	4	5	5	6	5
Taxes	14	16	12	13	6	5	11	8	5	4	3	6	4	6	6	5
Iraq	*	*	1	X	X	11	3	9	6	8	14	14	10	5	7	4
National security	X	X	2	2	6	3	6	5	2	2	2	5	2	4	5	4
Foreign policy (non-specific)	3	5	4	3	2	4	2	3	2	2	4	2	3	4	2	3
Housing	X	X	X	X	X	1	1	*	*	1	2	2	5	3	2	3
Energy	X	X	X	X	X	X	1	1	4	4	1	1	2	5	4	2
Immigration	2	1	*	1	1	1	2	2	3	20	12	12	9	6	3	2
Crime/violence	19	13	8	10	1	2	3	1	3	2	2	1	1	1	1	2
Environment	3	2	3	3	1	3	2	1	3	3	3	2	2	2	2	2
Gas and oil prices	X	X	X	X	X	X	1	1	10	8	2	1	10	11	1	2
Ethics in government	*	*	*	*	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	*	1	2
Domestic/social issues (non-specific)	2	3	2	2	2	2	1	2	2	3	3	2	2	1	1	2
Military/defense	2	2	2	4	4	1	5	3	1	4	2	2	2	3	2	2
Terrorism	X	X	X	X	22	17	11	7	7	4	4	3	2	2	3	2
Bailouts	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	*	1
Regulating banking/financial services industries	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	*	*	1
Medicare	4	5	5	6	1	1	4	3	2	1	3	1	1	*	2	1
Social security	6	6	24	16	3	2	4	4	10	5	3	4	3	2	3	1
Honesty/Integrity/Moral Values	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Middle East peace process between Palestinians and Israel	X	X	X	X	2	2	2	*	1	*	*	*	*	*	1	1
Homeland/domestic security/public safety	X	X	X	X	8	9	3	6	2	2	2	2	1	3	1	1
Peace/world peace/nuclear arms	1	3	3	1	2	2	3	*	1	1	2	1	*	*	1	1
Abortion	2	2	2	6	1	1	1	4	2	1	2	1	2	1	1	1
Welfare	14	8	4	2	1	1	3	*	3	1	2	1	1	1	*	1
Drugs	8	6	2	5	2	3	3	*	2	1	3	1	1	*	*	1
Inflation	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	1	2	3	*	2	2	*	1
Downsizing government	X	X	X	1	*	X	X	1	*	1	1	1	*	*	*	1
Religion (decline of)	*	1	*	1	2	1	1	1	*	1	1	1	1	1	*	1
(Programs for) the poor/ poverty	3	2	2	3	1	2	3	*	4	4	4	4	1	*	*	1
Homelessness	4	4	3	3	2	2	1	*	1	1	3	2	2	*	*	1
Programs for the elderly (not Medicare/Social Security)	1	1	1	2	1	1	3	*	*	*	1	1	*	*	1	*
Human/civil/women's rights	2	1	*	1	1	1	*	1	1	1	2	*	1	*	*	*
Judicial/Legal Issues	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	*	2	1	1	1	1	*	*	*
Same sex rights	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	1	1	2	*	*	1	*	*	*
School safety	X	X	X	X	X	X	2	*	1	1	1	*	*	*	*	*
Family values (decline of)	2	1	2	1	*	*	1	1	1	1	1	*	1	*	*	*
Bush/president	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	1	*	*	*	*	*
Race Relations	X	2	*	1	1	*	*	X	*	*	1	*	*	X	X	*
Second Amendment (right to bear arms)	X	*	*	*	*	X	*	*	*	*	*	1	*	*	X	*
AIDS	*	1	X	*	*	*	2	X	*	*	1	*	*	1	X	*
Medical research	X	X	X	X	X	X	2	2	1	*	2	*	*	X	X	*
Other <sup>1</sup>	8	19	2	19	3	8	8	8	1	6	5	4	4	5	15	2
Not sure/refused/no issue	9	12	16	18	11	10	12	9	8	6	8	3	2	6	4	4

\* = Less than 0.5%, X = Not mentioned as specific issue

<sup>1</sup> Including government/politics (nonspecific), disaster/Hurricane relief, Foreign Aid, trade, disability, promoting democracy, election/voter reform, Supreme Court, youth and FEMA

## Methodology

The Harris Poll® was conducted by telephone within the United States between January 7 and 11, 2009 among a nationwide cross section of 1,019 adults (aged 18 and over). Figures for age, sex, race/ethnicity, education, region, number of adults in the household, size of place (urbanicity) and number of phone lines in the household were weighted where necessary to bring them into line with their actual proportions in the population.

All sample surveys and polls, whether or not they use probability sampling, are subject to multiple sources of error which are most often not possible to quantify or estimate, including sampling error, coverage error, error associated with nonresponse, error associated with question wording and response options, and post-survey weighting and adjustments. Therefore, Harris Interactive avoids the words “margin of error” as they are misleading. All that can be calculated are different possible sampling errors with different probabilities for pure, unweighted, random samples with 100% response rates. These are only theoretical because no published polls come close to this ideal.

***These statements conform to the principles of disclosure of the National Council on Public Polls.***

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