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As Sequester Deadline Looms, Little Support for Cutting Most Programs

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT
THE PEW RESEARCH CENTER FOR THE
PEOPLE & THE PRESS**

Michael Dimock

Director

Carroll Doherty

Associate Director

Jocelyn Kiley

Senior Researcher

1615 L St, N.W., Suite 700
Washington, D.C. 20036
Tel (202) 419-4350
Fax (202) 419-4399
www.peoplepress.org

As Sequester Deadline Looms, Little Support for Cutting Most Programs

As the March 1 deadline for a possible budget sequester approaches, a new national survey finds limited public support for reducing spending for a range of specific programs, including defense, entitlements, education and health care.

For 18 of 19 programs tested, majorities want either to increase spending or maintain it at current levels. The only exception is assistance for needy people around the world. Nonetheless, as many say that funding for aid to the needy overseas should either be increased (21%), or kept the same (28%), as decreased (48%).

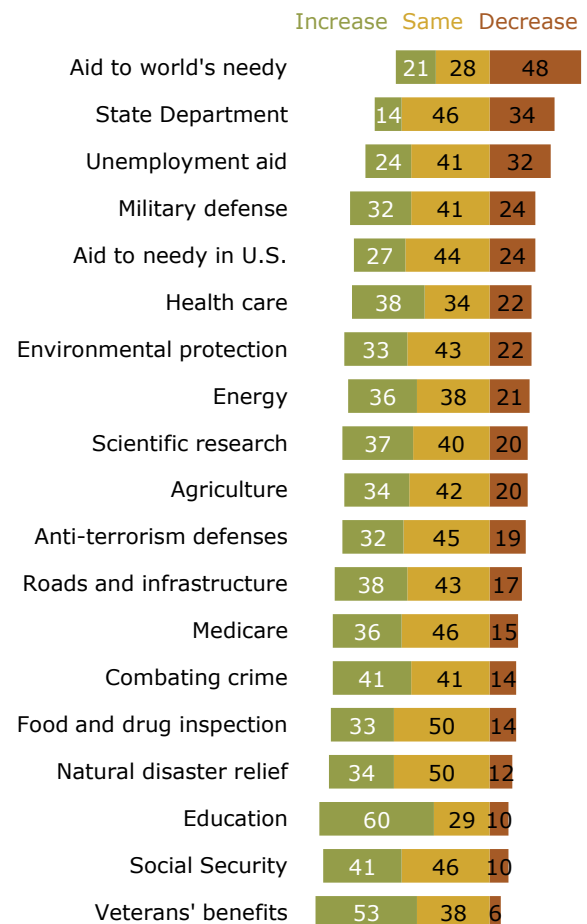
The survey by the Pew Research Center, conducted Feb. 13-18, 2013 among 1,504 adults, finds little change in attitudes about government spending since 2011. One notable exception: somewhat fewer support reducing military defense spending, which would bear a major share of the sequester cuts.

In the current poll, 24% say that if they were making up the federal government's budget this year they would decrease spending for military defense, down from 30% two years ago. More than seven-in-ten either support increasing defense spending (32%) or maintaining it at current levels (41%).

There continue to be sizable partisan differences in views of funding for government programs. For most, substantially larger shares of Republicans than Democrats support

Public Rejects Cuts in Government Spending in Most Areas

Would you increase, decrease or keep spending the same for...



PEW RESEARCH CENTER Feb. 13-18, 2013. Q28.

decreased funding. Yet there are only two possible reductions that draw majority support from Republicans – foreign aid (70%) and unemployment assistance (56%). There is no program among the 19 included in the survey that even a plurality of Democrats wants to see decreased.

An earlier report on this survey showed that 70% think it is essential for the president and Congress to pass major legislation to reduce the federal budget deficit this year. [That portion of the survey, conducted in collaboration with USA TODAY](#), also found that more Americans want the focus of deficit-reduction efforts to be mostly on spending reductions rather than tax increases.

Yet the survey also finds higher percentages support increases rather than decreases in spending for education, veterans' benefits, entitlements and other programs. Six-in-ten (60%) say they would increase education funding, while 53% want funding for veterans' benefits and services to grow and 41% say the same about spending on Social Security.

Partisans Differ on Gov't Spending

In 16 of 19 areas, Republicans are more likely than Democrats to support cutting spending. Only in the areas of military and anti-terrorism spending are Democrats more supportive of cuts than Republicans. There are no partisan differences about decreasing funding for veterans' benefits.

The largest partisan gaps are over aid to needy people both in the U.S. and abroad. Seven-in-ten Republicans (70%) say foreign aid should be decreased, compared with just a quarter (25%) of Democrats. Similarly, while 56% of Republicans say spending on unemployment assistance should be decreased, just 13% of Democrats agree.

By large margins, Democrats also are less supportive of cuts to health care, environmental protection and scientific research. While 44% of Republicans say federal funding for health care should be decreased, just 7% of Democrats do (in fact, a majority of Democrats – 58% – say federal spending on health care should be increased).

While Democrats are more likely than Republicans to favor cutting military spending, about as many Democrats say funding for the military should be increased as decreased (28% vs. 32%), and about twice as many say anti-terrorism funding should be increased as decreased (36% vs. 18%)

Spending Cuts Divide Parties

<i>Would you increase, decrease or keep spending the same for...</i>		Rep %	Dem %	Ind %	R-D gap
Aid to world's needy	Decrease	70	25	52	+45
	Increase	7	33	19	-26
Unemployment assistance	Decrease	56	13	32	+43
	Increase	9	41	20	-32
Aid to needy in the U.S.	Decrease	49	9	25	+40
	Increase	9	39	28	-30
Health care	Decrease	44	7	23	+37
	Increase	16	58	34	-42
Environmental protection	Decrease	40	8	21	+32
	Increase	12	52	31	-40
Scientific research	Decrease	32	10	21	+22
	Increase	22	47	38	-25
Energy	Decrease	30	12	23	+18
	Increase	25	46	36	-21
Medicare	Decrease	21	7	16	+14
	Increase	24	52	31	-28
Natural disaster relief	Decrease	21	7	13	+14
	Increase	24	40	34	-16
State Department	Decrease	41	25	36	+16
	Increase	15	12	15	+3
Social Security	Decrease	17	3	12	+14
	Increase	35	49	37	-14
Food and drug inspection	Decrease	23	8	15	+15
	Increase	18	46	32	-28
Agriculture	Decrease	28	16	20	+12
	Increase	30	39	31	-9
Education	Decrease	15	5	10	+10
	Increase	46	75	57	-29
Roads and infrastructure	Decrease	21	14	16	+7
	Increase	28	39	43	-11
Combating crime	Decrease	16	10	15	+6
	Increase	40	52	34	-12
Veterans' benefits	Decrease	7	6	6	+1
	Increase	55	51	53	+4
Anti-terrorism defenses	Decrease	10	18	26	-8
	Increase	36	36	27	0
Military defense	Decrease	11	32	26	-23
	Increase	48	28	27	+20

PEW RESEARCH CENTER Feb 13-18, 2013. Q28. Percent saying "keep spending the same" not shown.

Conversely, while Republicans are more supportive than Democrats of cutting funding for Medicare, Social Security and food and drug inspection, these remain minority positions within the GOP. More Republicans want to increase, rather than decrease, funding for Social Security (35% vs. 17%). And Republicans are as likely to say funding for Medicare should be increased as to say it should be decreased (24% vs. 21%).

Little Change in Opinions

Public attitudes about government spending are relatively unchanged from 2011; across 14 of the 16 issues where 2011 trends are available there is no significant shift in public opinion over the last few years.

In contrast to most other areas, there has been a drop in public support for increasing spending to provide economic assistance to needy people in the U.S.: 27% want this funding increased today, down from 42% in 2011. Although there remain significant partisan and demographic differences in support for spending on the needy in the U.S., the drop in support for increasing spending is seen across both party and socioeconomic lines.

Attitudes about military defense spending, which would be subject to the largest cuts under the budgets sequester, have also shifted slightly. There is now is somewhat less support for decreasing spending on

Spending Views Largely Unchanged since 2011

<i>Would you increase, decrease or keep spending the same for...</i>		2009	2011	2013	11-13 diff
		%	%	%	
Aid to world's needy	Decrease	34	45	48	+3
	Increase	26	21	21	0
State Department and American embassies	Decrease	28	--	34	--
	Increase	9	--	14	--
Unemployment assistance	Decrease	15	28	32	+4
	Increase	44	27	24	-3
Military defense	Decrease	18	30	24	-6
	Increase	40	31	32	+1
Aid to needy people in the U.S.	Decrease	--	20	24	+4
	Increase	--	42	27	-15
Health care	Decrease	10	24	22	-2
	Increase	61	41	38	-3
Environmental protection	Decrease	16	26	22	-4
	Increase	43	36	33	-3
Energy	Decrease	15	23	21	-2
	Increase	41	36	36	0
Scientific research	Decrease	14	23	20	-3
	Increase	39	36	37	+1
Agriculture	Decrease	12	23	20	-3
	Increase	35	32	34	+2
U.S. anti-terrorism defenses	Increase	35	33	32	-1
	Decrease	17	21	19	-2
Rebuilding roads and bridges	Decrease	--	21	17	-4
	Increase	--	38	38	0
Medicare	Decrease	6	12	15	+3
	Increase	53	40	36	-4
Combating crime	Decrease	10	18	14	-4
	Increase	45	39	41	+2
Education	Decrease	6	11	10	-1
	Increase	67	62	60	-2
Social Security	Decrease	--	12	10	-2
	Increase	--	41	41	0
Veterans' benefits and services	Decrease	2	6	6	0
	Increase	63	51	53	+2

PEW RESEARCH CENTER. Feb 13-18, 2013. Q28. Keep spending same not shown.

military defense (24% today, 30% in 2011).

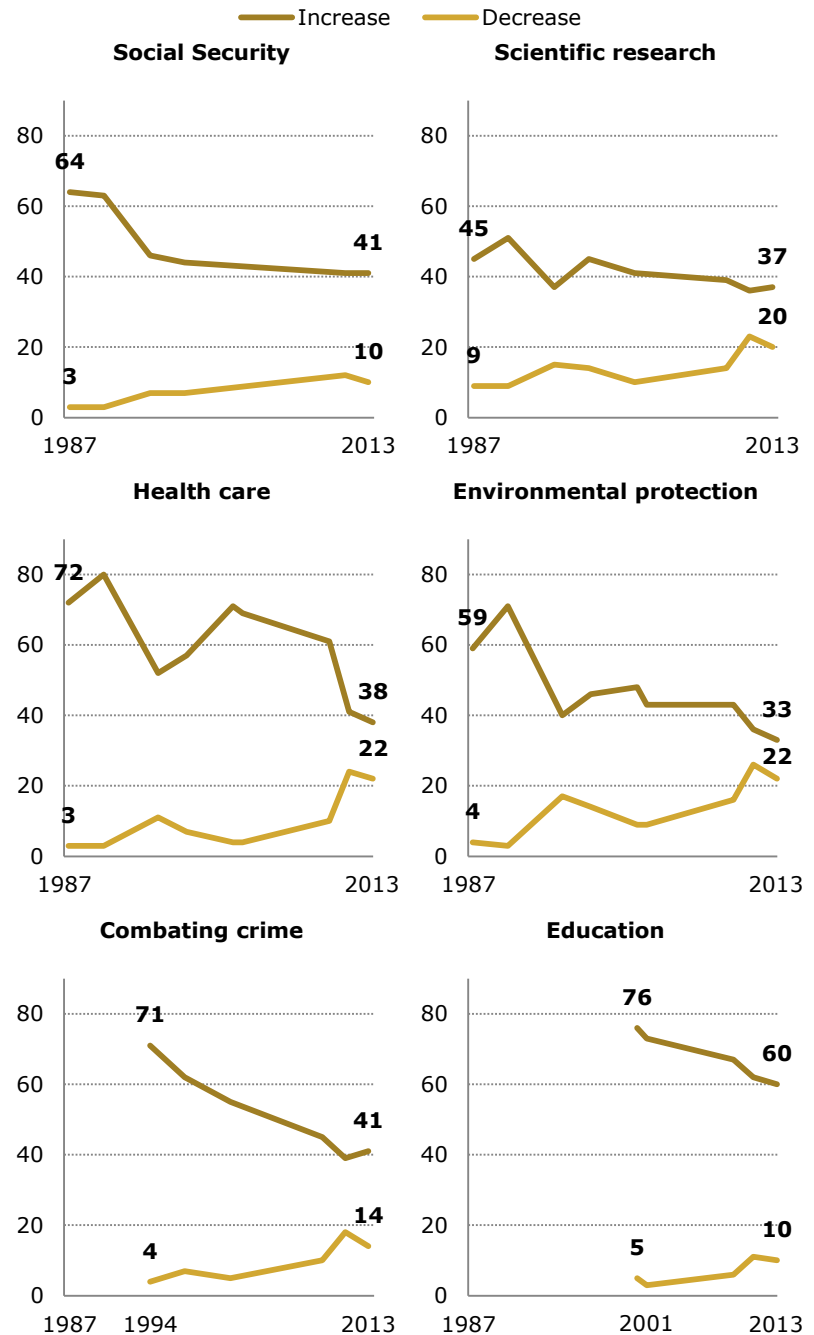
The overall stability of public opinion over the last two years stands in contrast to the shift from 2009 to 2011, when there was a drop in support for increases in spending across many of these same areas (See [*Fewer Want Spending to Grow, But Most Cuts Remain Unpopular*](#), February 10, 2011.)

Long-Term Trends

While there has been little change in public views on government spending within the last two years, the long-term trend over the past quarter-century is, for the most part, away from spending growth.

When the question was first asked in 1987, a 64% majority felt that Social Security spending should be increased; this stands at 41% in the new survey. Similarly, support for increased federal spending on health care has fallen from 72% to 38% since 1987, and the share favoring more spending on

A More Austere Public than in the Past



PEW RESEARCH CENTER Feb. 13-18, 2013. Q28. Keep spending same not shown.

environmental protection has declined from 59% to 33%.

While the trends are shorter, two other issues have seen similar trajectories. When first asked in 1994, 71% supported more federal spending on combating crime. This figure stands at 41% today. And even just over the past 12 years, the share saying education spending should be increased has fallen from 76% to 60%.

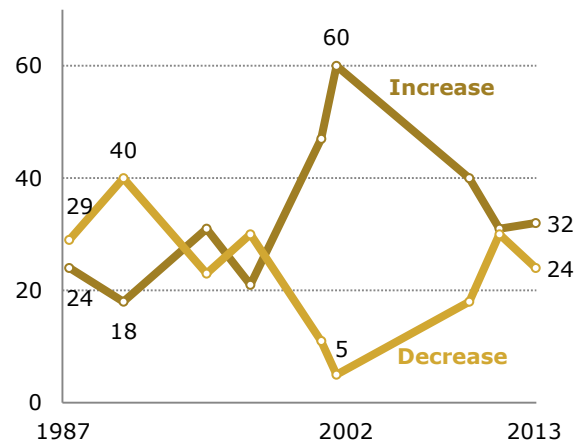
Views of Defense Spending

Public views on military defense spending have shifted substantially over the past quarter-century. In 1990, during George H.W. Bush's presidency, 40% wanted to decrease defense spending and just 18% favored increasing it. By contrast, in February 2002, following the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, a 60% majority backed increased spending on military defense, with just 5% saying spending should be lowered.

Currently, there is no public consensus on defense spending: 32% say it should be increased, virtually unchanged from 31% two years ago. About a quarter (24%) say it should be decreased, down from 30% in 2011. And a plurality (41%) say defense spending should be kept the same.

After 9/11 Spike, Fewer Back Defense Spending Growth

Military defense spending



PEW RESEARCH CENTER Feb. 13-18, 2013. Q28k. Keep spending same not shown.

Beyond the significant political divide over defense spending, there also are differences of opinion by age and education. Those younger than 30 are far more likely to support defense spending cuts (36%) than are those 65 and older (13%).

The divide also is stark along educational lines: college graduates are twice as likely to back defense spending cuts compared with those who have not attended college (38% vs. 18%).

Age and Education Differences on Defense Spending

<i>Military defense spending</i>	In-crease	De-crease	Keep the same	N
	%	%	%	
Total	32	24	41	764
Men	32	26	41	376
Women	32	23	40	388
18-29	31	36	22	116
30-49	27	20	51	232
50-64	38	28	33	205
65+	36	13	45	190
College grad+	20	38	41	282
Some college	35	20	42	188
HS or less	38	18	40	287

PEW RESEARCH CENTER Feb. 13-18, 2013. Q28k.

About the Survey

The analysis in this report is based on telephone interviews conducted February 13-18, 2013 among a national sample of 1,504 adults, 18 years of age or older, living in all 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia (752 respondents were interviewed on a landline telephone, and 752 were interviewed on a cell phone, including 364 who had no landline telephone). The survey was conducted by interviewers at Princeton Data Source under the direction of Princeton Survey Research Associates International. A combination of landline and cell phone random digit dial samples were used; both samples were provided by Survey Sampling International. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish. Respondents in the landline sample were selected by randomly asking for the youngest adult male or female who is now at home. Interviews in the cell sample were conducted with the person who answered the phone, if that person was an adult 18 years of age or older. For detailed information about our survey methodology, see <http://people-press.org/methodology/>

The combined landline and cell phone sample are weighted using an iterative technique that matches gender, age, education, race, Hispanic origin and nativity and region to parameters from the 2011 Census Bureau's American Community Survey and population density to parameters from the Decennial Census. The sample also is weighted to match current patterns of telephone status and relative usage of landline and cell phones (for those with both), based on extrapolations from the 2012 National Health Interview Survey. The weighting procedure also accounts for the fact that respondents with both landline and cell phones have a greater probability of being included in the combined sample and adjusts for household size among respondents with a landline phone. Sampling errors and statistical tests of significance take into account the effect of weighting. The following table shows the unweighted sample sizes and the error attributable to sampling that would be expected at the 95% level of confidence for different groups in the survey:

Group	Unweighted sample size	Plus or minus...
Total sample	1,504	2.9 percentage points
Form 1	740	4.2 percentage points
Republicans	164	8.9 percentage points
Democrats	232	7.5 percentage points
Independents	312	6.5 percentage points
Form 2	764	4.1 percentage points
Republicans	202	8.0 percentage points
Democrats	238	7.4 percentage points
Independents	292	6.7 percentage points

Note that the spending questions in this release (Q28) were each asked only of about half of respondents (one form). Sample sizes and sampling errors for other subgroups are available upon request.

In addition to sampling error, one should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

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PEW RESEARCH CENTER FOR THE PEOPLE & THE PRESS
FEBRUARY 2013 POLITICAL SURVEY
FINAL TOPLINE
February 13-18, 2013
N=1,504

QUESTIONS 1-4, 7-8, 10-12, 15-20 PREVIOUSLY RELEASED

NO QUESTIONS 5-6, 9, 13-14, 21, 24-27

QUESTIONS 22-23 HELD FOR FUTURE RELEASE

ASK ALL:

Next,

Q.28 If you were making up the budget for the federal government this year, would you increase spending, decrease spending or keep spending the same for **[INSERT FIRST ITEM, RANDOMIZE, OBSERVE FORM SPLITS]**? What about for **[NEXT ITEM]**? **[REPEAT AS NECESSARY, AT LEAST EVERY THIRD ITEM]**: Would you increase spending, decrease spending or keep spending the same for **[ITEM]?** **[INTERVIEWER NOTE: IF RESPONDENT ASKS ABOUT SEQUESTER/PENDING BUDGET CUTS, CLARIFY FROM CURRENT SPENDING LEVELS]**

		<u>Increase spending</u>	<u>Decrease spending</u>	<u>Keep spending the same</u>	(VOL.) DK/Ref
ASK FORM 1 ONLY [N=740]:					
a.F1	Health care				
	Feb 13-18, 2013	38	22	34	6
	Feb 2-7, 2011	41	24	30	5
	Jun 18-21, 2009	61	10	24	6
	February, 2002	69	4	24	3
	April, 2001	71	4	23	2
	May, 1997	57	7	34	2
	December, 1994	52	11	33	4
	August, 1990	74	6	18	2
	May, 1990	80	3	16	1
	May, 1987	72	3	23	2
b.F1	Energy				
	Feb 13-18, 2013	36	21	38	5
	Feb 2-7, 2011	36	23	37	4
	Jun 18-21, 2009	41	15	35	9
	February, 2002	34	9	49	8
	April, 2001	52	9	35	4
c.F1	Anti-terrorism defenses in the U.S.				
	Feb 13-18, 2013	32	19	45	3
	Feb 2-7, 2011	33	21	43	4
	Jun 18-21, 2009	35	17	41	7
	February, 2002	63	4	29	4
d.F1	Veterans benefits and services				
	Feb 13-18, 2013	53	6	38	3
	Feb 2-7, 2011	51	6	40	3
	Jun 18-21, 2009	63	2	29	6
	April, 2001	58	3	34	5
e.F1	Natural disaster relief programs				
	Feb 13-18, 2013	34	12	50	5
f.F1	The State Department and American Embassies				
	Feb 13-18, 2013	14	34	46	6
	Mid-June, 2009	9	28	50	12
	April, 2001	11	26	55	8

Q.28 CONTINUED...

		<u>Increase spending</u>	<u>Decrease spending</u>	<u>Keep spending the same</u>	(VOL.) DK/Ref
g.F1	Social Security				
	Feb 13-18, 2013	41	10	46	3
	Feb 2-7, 2011	41	12	43	3
	May, 1997	44	7	46	3
	December, 1994	46	7	45	2
	May, 1990	63	3	32	2
	May, 1987	64	3	31	2
h.F1	Rebuilding highways, bridges and roads				
	Feb 13-18, 2013	38	17	43	2
	Feb 2-7, 2011	38	21	37	3
	May, 1990	54	5	40	1
i.F1	Economic assistance to needy people in the U.S.				
	Feb 13-18, 2013	27	24	44	4
	Feb 2-7, 2011	42	20	34	3
ASK FORM 2 ONLY [N=764]:					
j.F2	Scientific research				
	Feb 13-18, 2013	37	20	40	3
	Feb 2-7, 2011	36	23	37	4
	Jun 18-21, 2009	39	14	40	7
	April, 2001	41	10	46	3
	May, 1997	45	14	38	3
	December, 1994	37	15	44	4
	May, 1990	51	9	37	3
	May, 1987	45	9	42	4
k.F2	Military defense				
	Feb 13-18, 2013	32	24	41	3
	Feb 2-7, 2011	31	30	36	3
	Jun 18-21, 2009	40	18	37	5
	February, 2002	60	5	31	4
	April, 2001	47	11	40	2
	May, 1997	21	30	46	3
	December, 1994	31	23	44	2
	August, 1990	23	43	31	3
	May, 1990	18	40	39	3
	May, 1987	24	29	44	3
l.F2	Government assistance for the unemployed				
	Feb 13-18, 2013	24	32	41	3
	Feb 2-7, 2011	27	28	41	4
	Jun 18-21, 2009	44	15	36	6
	February, 2002	40	14	41	5
	May, 1997	20	33	44	3
	December, 1994	25	23	49	3
	February, 1989	26	14	57	3
	May, 1987	41	15	41	3
m.F2	Agriculture				
	Feb 13-18, 2013	34	20	42	4
	Feb 2-7, 2011	32	23	39	5
	Jun 18-21, 2009	35	12	41	13
	April, 2001	46	8	42	4
n.F2	Medicare				
	Feb 13-18, 2013	36	15	46	3
	Feb 2-7, 2011	40	12	43	5

Q.28 CONTINUED...

		<u>Increase spending</u>	<u>Decrease spending</u>	<u>Keep spending the same</u>	(VOL.) DK/Ref
	Jun 18-21, 2009	53	6	37	4
	February, 2002	63	3	31	3
	April, 2001	70	2	26	2
	May, 1997	44	8	44	4
o.F2	Combating crime				
	Feb 13-18, 2013	41	14	41	4
	Feb 2-7, 2011	39	18	40	3
	Jun 18-21, 2009	45	10	39	6
	April, 2001	55	5	37	3
	May, 1997	62	7	29	2
	December, 1994	71	4	23	2
p.F2	Environmental protection				
	Feb 13-18, 2013	33	22	43	3
	Feb 2-7, 2011	36	26	36	3
	Jun 18-21, 2009	43	16	34	6
	February, 2002	43	9	45	3
	April, 2001	48	9	40	3
	May, 1997	46	14	38	2
	December, 1994	40	17	40	3
	May, 1990	71	3	24	2
	May, 1987	59	4	34	3
q.F2	Economic assistance to needy people around the world				
	Feb 13-18, 2013	21	48	28	3
	Feb 2-7, 2011	21	45	29	4
	Jun 18-21, 2009	26	34	33	7
r.F2	Education				
	Feb 13-18, 2013	60	10	29	2
	Feb 2-7, 2011	62	11	25	2
	Jun 18-21, 2009	67	6	23	4
	February, 2002	73	3	22	2
	April, 2001	76	5	18	1
s.F2	Food and drug inspection				
	Feb 13-18, 2013	33	14	50	2

NO QUESTIONS 29-37, 43-47, 55-60
QUESTIONS 38-39, 48-54 HELD FOR FUTURE RELEASE
QUESTIONS 40-42, 61-64 PREVIOUSLY RELEASED

ASK ALL:

PARTY In politics TODAY, do you consider yourself a Republican, Democrat, or independent?

ASK IF INDEP/NO PREF/OTHER/DK/REF (PARTY=3,4,5,9):

PARTYLN As of today do you lean more to the Republican Party or more to the Democratic Party?

				(VOL.)	(VOL.)	(VOL.)	Lean	Lean
	Republican	Democrat	Independent	No preference	Other party	DK/Ref	Rep	Dem
Feb. 13-18, 2013	22	32	41	2	*	2	15	19
Jan 9-13, 2013	25	32	38	2	*	2	15	16
Dec 17-19, 2012	21	32	38	4	*	4	15	14
Dec 5-9, 2012	23	33	38	3	1	2	14	19
Oct 31-Nov 3, 2012	26	34	34	3	1	3	13	16
Oct 24-28, 2012	28	33	33	4	*	2	12	16
Oct 4-7, 2012	27	31	36	3	1	3	15	15
Sep 12-16, 2012	24	35	36	2	*	2	14	16
Jul 16-26, 2012	22	33	38	4	*	3	14	15
Jun 28-Jul 9, 2012	24	33	37	3	*	3	15	17
Jun 7-17, 2012	24	33	39	2	*	2	17	17
May 9-Jun 3, 2012	24	32	36	4	*	4	13	14
Apr 4-15, 2012	24	31	39	3	*	2	15	15
Mar 7-11, 2012	24	34	36	3	1	2	16	17
Feb 8-12, 2012	26	32	36	4	1	2	13	17
Yearly Totals								
2012	24.7	32.6	36.4	3.1	.5	2.7	14.4	16.1
2011	24.3	32.3	37.4	3.1	.4	2.5	15.7	15.6
2010	25.2	32.7	35.2	3.6	.4	2.8	14.5	14.1
2009	23.9	34.4	35.1	3.4	.4	2.8	13.1	15.7
2008	25.7	36.0	31.5	3.6	.3	3.0	10.6	15.2
2007	25.3	32.9	34.1	4.3	.4	2.9	10.9	17.0
2006	27.8	33.1	30.9	4.4	.3	3.4	10.5	15.1
2005	29.3	32.8	30.2	4.5	.3	2.8	10.3	14.9
2004	30.0	33.5	29.5	3.8	.4	3.0	11.7	13.4
2003	30.3	31.5	30.5	4.8	.5	2.5	12.0	12.6
2002	30.4	31.4	29.8	5.0	.7	2.7	12.4	11.6
2001	29.0	33.2	29.5	5.2	.6	2.6	11.9	11.6
2001 Post-Sept 11	30.9	31.8	27.9	5.2	.6	3.6	11.7	9.4
2001 Pre-Sept 11	27.3	34.4	30.9	5.1	.6	1.7	12.1	13.5
2000	28.0	33.4	29.1	5.5	.5	3.6	11.6	11.7
1999	26.6	33.5	33.7	3.9	.5	1.9	13.0	14.5
1998	27.9	33.7	31.1	4.6	.4	2.3	11.6	13.1
1997	28.0	33.4	32.0	4.0	.4	2.3	12.2	14.1
1996	28.9	33.9	31.8	3.0	.4	2.0	12.1	14.9
1995	31.6	30.0	33.7	2.4	.6	1.3	15.1	13.5
1994	30.1	31.5	33.5	1.3	--	3.6	13.7	12.2
1993	27.4	33.6	34.2	4.4	1.5	2.9	11.5	14.9
1992	27.6	33.7	34.7	1.5	0	2.5	12.6	16.5
1991	30.9	31.4	33.2	0	1.4	3.0	14.7	10.8
1990	30.9	33.2	29.3	1.2	1.9	3.4	12.4	11.3
1989	33	33	34	--	--	--	--	--
1987	26	35	39	--	--	--	--	--

ASK REPUBLICANS AND REPUBLICAN LEANERS ONLY (PARTY=1 OR PARTYLN=1) [N=610]:

TEAPARTY3 From what you know, do you agree or disagree with the Tea Party movement, or don't you have an opinion either way?

Feb 13-18 <u>2013</u>		Jan 9-13 <u>2013</u>
36	Agree	35
9	Disagree	10
52	No opinion either way	51
1	Haven't heard of (VOL.)	2
3	Refused (VOL.)	2