



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
 January 7, 2008

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Americans Assess Progress on National Problems

GAINS SEEN ON MINORITY DISCRIMINATION - BUT LITTLE ELSE

As Barack Obama prepares to take office, majorities say the country is losing ground on any number of key issues, particularly economic ones. Nearly eight-in-ten (79%) say the country is falling further behind on the federal budget deficit, far more than said that during the mid-1990s when the deficit was a top-tier policy issue.

Fully 72% say the country is losing ground on the availability of good-paying jobs – up 25 points since February 2007. Nearly as many (69%) say the country is losing ground on the cost of living.

Notably, the only issue where most people see progress being achieved is no doubt related to Obama’s historic election: 53% say the country is making progress on discrimination against minorities, compared with just 15% who say the country is losing ground, and 28% who see little change. During the mid-1990s, far fewer people said progress was being achieved reducing discrimination (40% in 1995, 38% in 1994).

	Majorities See Country “Losing Ground” on Most Issues			
	<i>% Saying the country is...</i>			
	<u>Losing ground</u>	<u>About the same</u>	<u>Making progress</u>	<u>DK</u>
	%	%	%	%
Budget deficit	79	15	3	3=100
Job availability	72	21	5	2=100
Cost of living	69	20	8	3=100
Social Security	63	23	6	8=100
Gap between rich and poor	59	32	5	4=100
Competing w/other countries	58	30	8	4=100
Low moral standards	56	30	10	4=100
Health care system	56	33	8	3=100
Medicare	53	31	6	10=100
Poverty/homelessness	52	34	11	3=100
Illegal immigration	51	34	10	5=100
Public education	50	28	19	3=100
Crime	41	36	20	3=100
Environmental pollution	33	31	32	4=100
The war in Afghanistan	31	42	21	6=100
International terrorism	28	37	32	3=100
The war in Iraq	26	34	36	4=100
Minority discrimination	15	28	53	4=100

The survey by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, conducted Dec. 3-7 among 1,489 adults reached on landline phones and cell phones, finds that Republicans and Democrats generally agree that the country is losing ground on the budget deficit and jobs. In addition, majorities of Democrats (59%) and Republicans (54%), as well as 62% of independents, say the country is losing ground in competing with other countries economically.

Yet there are wide partisan differences in views about a number of other issues, including the war in Iraq, the gap between rich and poor and poverty. Nearly four-in-ten Democrats (39%) say the country is losing ground on Iraq compared with just 8% of Republicans.

Seven-in-ten Democrats (70%) say the country is losing ground on the gap between rich and poor; just 42% of Republicans agree. Democrats also are far more likely than Republicans to see the country losing ground on poverty and homelessness.

<i>% saying country is "losing ground" on...</i>	Total %	Rep %	Dem %	Ind %	R-D Diff
The war in Iraq	26	8	39	25	-31
Gap between rich and poor	59	42	70	63	-28
Poverty/homelessness	52	34	62	54	-28
Health care system	56	41	67	56	-26
The war in Afghanistan	31	20	36	30	-16
Environmental pollution	33	23	39	33	-16
International terrorism	28	20	34	27	-14
Cost of living	69	61	74	74	-13
Job availability	72	68	77	70	-9
Minority discrimination	15	8	15	14	-7
Competing w/other countries	58	54	59	62	-5
Medicare	53	51	54	55	-3
Budget deficit	79	75	78	83	-3
Crime	41	38	40	42	-2
Public education	50	47	49	54	-2
Social Security	63	63	65	66	-2
Low moral standards	56	68	49	54	+19
Illegal immigration	51	62	42	54	+20

By contrast, more than six-in-ten Republicans express pessimism about the country's progress on illegal immigration (62% say we are losing ground) and on moral and ethical standards (68%). Fewer than half of Democrats say the country is losing ground in those areas (42% and 49%, respectively).

Mixed Views of Progress on International Issues

Most Republicans (62%) say the United States is making progress in Iraq, while 26% say things are about the same as they have been and just 8% say the United States is losing ground there. Democrats are more evenly divided, with 41% saying things are about the same, 39% saying the country is losing ground, and just 16% saying progress is being made.

Americans generally express less positive opinions about the war in Afghanistan than they do about the country's involvement in Iraq. About one-in-five say the country is making progress on the war in Afghanistan (21%), just over four-in-ten say things are the same as they have been (42%), and 31% say the country is losing ground on the war in Afghanistan. Republicans, in particular, are much less

optimistic about progress in Afghanistan than in Iraq: 37% say the country is making progress in Afghanistan, compared with 62% who say the same about the war in Iraq. Few Democrats see the country making progress in either conflict (16% Iraq, 10% Afghanistan).

When it comes to dealing with international terrorism, about half of Republicans think the country is making progress (49%), 30% think things are about the same as they have been, and just 20% say the country is losing ground. In contrast, 34% of Democrats say the country is losing ground on terrorism, 37% say things have not changed much, and about a quarter (26%) say the country is making progress.

Iraq, Afghanistan and Terrorism				
	Total	Rep	Dem	Ind
	%	%	%	%
Iraq				
Losing ground	26	8	39	25
About the same	34	26	41	35
Making progress	36	62	16	36
Don't know	<u>4</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>4</u>
	100	100	100	100
Afghanistan				
Losing ground	31	20	36	30
About the same	42	36	48	44
Making progress	21	37	10	21
Don't know	<u>6</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>5</u>
	100	100	100	100
Terrorism				
Losing ground	28	20	34	27
About the same	37	30	37	44
Making progress	32	49	26	27
Don't know	<u>3</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>2</u>
	100	100	100	100

More Signs of Economic Pessimism

Reflecting the public's bleak overall assessment of the national economy, large majorities say the country is losing ground on every economic issue asked about. (*For more on views of the economy, see "Psychology of Bad Times Fueling Consumer Cutbacks," Dec. 11, 2008*).

Nearly eight-in-ten Americans (79%) say the country is losing ground on the budget deficit; 72% offer the same view about the availability of good-paying jobs; and 69% say the country is losing ground on the cost of living. The proportion saying the country is losing ground on the deficit has increased 15 points since February 2007. Perceptions of job availability also have grown much more negative over that period.

There is no recent trend measure in views of whether the country is making progress or losing ground on the cost of living. Currently, 69% say the country is losing ground in that area, which is higher than during the mid-1990s (61% in 1995, 59% in 1994). Opinions about national progress on the gap between rich and poor have remained relatively stable since February 2007, and are comparable to those measured in 1989.

Americans also express negative views about the country's ability to compete economically with other countries: 58% say the country is losing ground, while just 8% say it is making progress and 30% say the country's ability to compete with other countries is about the same as it has been in the past. In March 1994, when Pew last asked about this item, 43% thought the country was losing ground when it came to its ability to compete internationally while about a quarter said it was either making progress (24%) or that things were about the same as they had been (26%).

	Losing ground %	About the same %	Making progress %	DK %
Budget deficit	79	15	3	3=100
February 2007	64	20	8	8=100
May 2005	65	19	6	10=100
November 1997	29	30	32	9=100
December 1996	48	24	23	5=100
April 1995	60	21	15	4=100
March 1994	60	21	11	8=100
February 1989	50	27	16	7=100
Job availability	72	21	5	2=100
February 2007	47	32	16	5=100
May 2005	55	25	15	5=100
March 2002	51	22	21	6=100
February 2001	36	26	33	5=100
November 1997	37	28	31	4=100
December 1996	51	26	19	4=100
April 1995	55	24	17	4=100
March 1994	63	23	10	4=100
Cost of living	69	20	8	3=100
April 1995	61	28	9	2=100
March 1994	59	32	8	1=100
Rich-poor gap	59	32	5	4=100
February 2007	63	27	7	3=100
February 1989	58	30	8	4=100
Competing w/other countries	58	30	8	4=100
March 1994	43	26	24	7=100

ABOUT THE SURVEY

Results for this survey are based on telephone interviews conducted under the direction of Princeton Survey Research Associates among a nationwide sample of 1,489 adults, 18 years of age or older, from December 3-7, 2008 (1,126 respondents were interviewed on a landline telephone, and 363 were interviewed on a cell phone, including 138 who had no landline telephone). Both the landline and cell phone samples were provided by Survey Sampling International.

The combined landline and cell phone sample are weighted using an iterative technique that matches gender, age, education, race/ethnicity, region, and population density to parameters from the March 2007 Census Bureau's Current Population Survey. The sample is also 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 2007 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 sample.

The following table shows the error attributable to sampling that would be expected at the 95% level of confidence for different groups in the survey:

Group	Sample Size	Plus or minus...
Total sample	1,489	3.0 percentage points
Form 1 sample	766	4.0 percentage points
Form 2 sample	723	4.5 percentage points

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.

ABOUT THE CENTER

The Pew Research Center for the People & the Press is an independent opinion research group that studies attitudes toward the press, politics and public policy issues. We are sponsored by The Pew Charitable Trusts and are one of seven projects that make up the Pew Research Center, a nonpartisan "fact tank" that provides information on the issues, attitudes and trends shaping America and the world.

The Center's purpose is to serve as a forum for ideas on the media and public policy through public opinion research. In this role it serves as an important information resource for political leaders, journalists, scholars, and public interest organizations. All of our current survey results are made available free of charge.

All of the Center's research and reports are collaborative products based on the input and analysis of the entire Center staff consisting of:

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PEW RESEARCH CENTER FOR THE PEOPLE & THE PRESS
DECEMBER 2008 POLITICAL & ECONOMIC SURVEY
FINAL TOPLINE
 December 3-7, 2008
 N=1,489

QUESTIONS 1 THROUGH 15 PREVIOUSLY RELEASED

ASK ALL:

Q.16 As I read a list of some problems, please tell me if you think the country is making progress, losing ground, or if things are about the same as they have been. First, **[INSERT ITEM, RANDOMIZE OBSERVE FORM SPLITS]**. Do you think the country is making progress, losing ground, or are things about the same as they have been when it comes to **[ITEM]**? How about **[NEXT ITEM]**? **[REPEAT AS NECESSARY]**: Do you think the country is making progress, losing ground, or are things about the same as they have been on this issue?¹

		(VOL.)			
		<u>Making</u>	<u>About</u>	<u>Losing</u>	<u>Don't</u>
		<u>Progress</u>	<u>The Same</u>	<u>Ground</u>	<u>Know</u>
ASK FORM 1 ONLY [N=766]:					
aF1.	The way the health care system is working				
	December, 2008	8	33	56	3=100
	February, 2007	13	24	60	3=100
	May, 2005	9	25	62	4=100
	March, 2002	16	25	54	5=100
	February, 2001	13	29	53	5=100
	November, 1997	16	26	54	4=100
	December, 1996	20	25	52	3=100
	April, 1995	14	30	53	3=100
	March, 1994	16	31	49	4=100
bF1.	The availability of good-paying jobs				
	December, 2008	5	21	72	2=100
	February, 2007	16	32	47	5=100
	May, 2005	15	25	55	5=100
	March, 2002	21	22	51	6=100
	February, 2001	33	26	36	5=100
	November, 1997	31	28	37	4=100
	December, 1996	19	26	51	4=100
	April, 1995	17	24	55	4=100
	March, 1994	10	23	63	4=100
cF1.	The federal budget deficit				
	December, 2008	3	15	79	3=100
	February, 2007	8	20	64	8=100
	May, 2005	6	19	65	10=100
	November, 1997	32	30	29	9=100
	December, 1996	23	24	48	5=100
	April, 1995	15	21	60	4=100
	March, 1994	11	21	60	8=100
	February, 1989 ²	16	27	50	7=100

¹ Before December 2008, this question was worded: "Next, as I read you some problem areas, please tell me how you think each is affecting this country today. (First,) do you think the problem of **[INSERT ITEM, RANDOMIZE OBSERVE FORM SPLITS]** is ABOUT THE SAME as it has been, that the country is MAKING PROGRESS in this area, or that the country is LOSING GROUND?" In February 1989, the question wording did not ask about "this country today," and the response choices were "a problem that is no better or no worse than it had been, a problem where progress is being made, or a problem where we are losing ground."

² In February 1989, the item was "the budget deficit."

Q.16 CONTINUED ...

		<u>Making</u>	<u>About</u>	<u>Losing</u>	(VOL.) <u>Don't</u>
		<u>Progress</u>	<u>The Same</u>	<u>Ground</u>	<u>Know</u>
dF1.	The gap between rich and poor				
	December, 2008	5	32	59	4=100
	February, 2007	7	27	63	3=100
	February, 1989	8	30	58	4=100
e.F1	Low moral and ethical standards				
	December, 2008	10	30	56	4=100
	February, 2007	8	32	55	5=100
	March, 2002	14	28	53	5=100
	November, 1997	9	28	56	7=100
	December, 1996	12	24	62	2=100
	April, 1995	7	20	70	3=100
	March, 1994	6	29	63	2=100
f.F1	Illegal immigration				
	December, 2008	10	34	51	5=100
	February, 2007	11	25	59	5=100
	May, 2005	11	29	52	8=100
	November, 1997	13	29	48	10=100
	December, 1996	15	32	47	6=100
	April, 1995	9	23	62	6=100
	March, 1994	9	22	58	11=100
g.F1	The financial condition of Medicare				
	December, 2008	6	31	53	10=100
	May, 2005	5	26	56	13=100
h.F1	Our ability to compete economically with other countries				
	December, 2008	8	30	58	4=100
	March, 1994	24	26	43	7=100
NO ITEMS i. OR j.					
ASK FORM 2 ONLY [N=723]:					
k.F2	International terrorism				
	December, 2008	32	37	28	3=100
	February, 2007	30	27	38	5=100
	May, 2005	36	28	31	5=100
	March, 2002	40	14	40	6=100
	April, 1995	19	40	36	5=100
	March, 1994	20	41	35	4=100
	February, 1989	18	24	53	5=100
l.F2	The quality of public education				
	December, 2008	19	28	50	3=100
	February, 2007	24	26	45	5=100
	May, 2005	20	26	50	4=100
	March, 2002	27	22	45	6=100
	February, 2001	23	20	53	4=100
	November, 1997	26	26	46	2=100
	December, 1996	24	22	52	2=100
	April, 1995	18	20	60	2=100
	March, 1994	17	19	61	3=100

Q.16 CONTINUED ...

		<u>Making</u>	<u>About</u>	<u>Losing</u>	<u>(VOL.)</u>
		<u>Progress</u>	<u>The Same</u>	<u>Ground</u>	<u>Don't</u>
					<u>Know</u>
m.F2	Environmental pollution				
	December, 2008	32	31	33	4=100
	February, 2007	20	26	52	2=100
	May, 2005	21	35	37	7=100
	November, 1997	38	32	27	3=100
	December, 1996	42	26	30	2=100
	April, 1995	43	26	30	1=100
	March, 1994	37	26	34	3=100
	February, 1989	32	20	42	6=100
n.F2	The financial condition of Social Security				
	December, 2008	6	23	63	8=100
	May, 2005	6	25	63	6=100
o.F2	Poverty, hunger and homelessness				
	December, 2008	11	34	52	3=100
	March, 2002	20	33	42	5=100
	November, 1997	18	40	37	5=100
	December, 1996	14	30	54	2=100
	April, 1995	11	30	57	2=100
	March, 1994	9	32	56	3=100
	February, 1989 ³	22	23	53	2=100
p.F2	Crime				
	December, 2008	20	36	41	3=100
	March, 2002	27	34	35	4=100
	February, 2001	29	31	38	2=100
	November, 1997	24	30	44	2=100
	December, 1996	15	23	61	1=100
	April, 1995	9	13	77	1=100
	March, 1994	7	15	77	1=100
	February, 1989	15	19	64	2=100
q.F2	The cost of living				
	December, 2008	8	20	69	3=100
	April, 1995	9	28	61	2=100
	March, 1994	8	32	59	1=100
r.F2	Discrimination against minorities				
	December, 2008	53	28	15	4=100
	April, 1995	40	32	26	2=100
	March, 1994	38	32	25	5=100

³

In February 1989, the item was "poverty, hunger, and homelessness in society."

ASK ALL:

Q.17 And thinking about [**INSERT ITEM; OBSERVE FORM SPLIT**], do you think the U.S. is MAKING PROGRESS, LOSING GROUND, or are things ABOUT THE SAME as they have been in the past?

				(VOL.)
ASK FORM 1 ONLY [N=766]:	<u>Making</u>	<u>About</u>	<u>Losing</u>	<u>Don't</u>
a.F1 The war in Iraq	<u>Progress</u>	<u>The Same</u>	<u>Ground</u>	<u>Know</u>
	36	34	26	4=100
ASK FORM 2 ONLY [N=723]:				
b.F2 The war in Afghanistan	21	42	31	6=100

NO QUESTION 18

QUESTIONS 19 THROUGH END PREVIOUSLY RELEASED