



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**  
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**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:**  
Andrew Kohut, Director

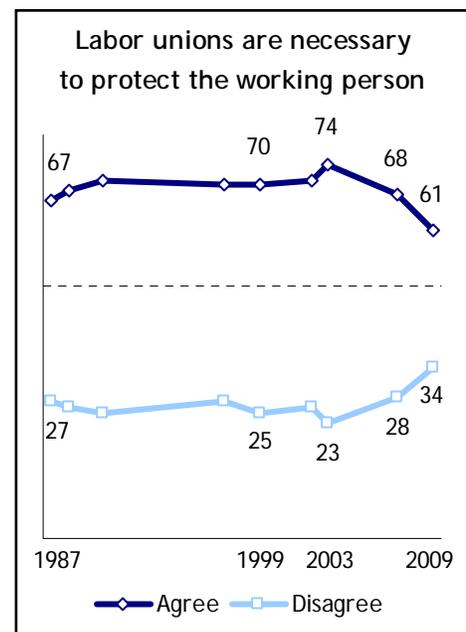
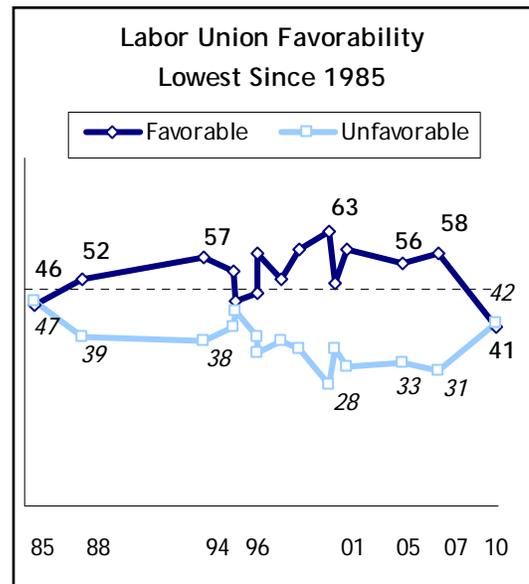
## FAVORABLE RATINGS OF LABOR UNIONS FALL SHARPLY

Favorable views of labor unions have plummeted since 2007, amid growing public skepticism about unions' purpose and power. Currently, 41% say they have a favorable opinion of labor unions while about as many (42%) express an unfavorable opinion. In January 2007, a clear majority (58%) had a favorable view of unions while just 31% had an unfavorable impression.

The latest nationwide survey by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, conducted Feb. 3-9 among 1,383 adults reached on cell phones and landlines, finds that favorable opinions of unions have fallen across demographic and partisan groups. Still, far more Democrats have favorable views of unions (56%) than do independents (38%) or Republicans (29%).

Last year, a Pew Research survey found a decline in the proportion of the public saying labor unions are necessary to protect working people, while more expressed concern about the power of unions. In April 2009, 61% agreed with the statement "labor unions are necessary to protect the working person," down from 68% in 2007 and 74% in 2003. In the same survey, six-in-ten (61%) agreed that "labor unions have too much power," up from 52% in 1999.

The findings about eroding public support for unions are consistent with other recent surveys. In August



2009, Gallup found that fewer than half of Americans (48%) approve of labor unions, an all-time low for a question that has been asked since 1936. In August 2008, 59% said they approved of labor unions.

### Declines in Labor Favorability Among Most Groups

In recent years, positive attitudes about labor unions have declined significantly across most demographic groups. The largest change has come among those 65 and older. Currently 29% of this group says they have a favorable opinion of unions, down 31 points from 60% in 2007. Notably, those younger than 30 are the only age group in which a majority (53%) expresses a favorable view of unions; even so, far more young people (66%) expressed a positive opinion two years ago.

Though ratings by whites and blacks are both down, a greater percentage of African Americans continues to have a favorable impression of unions – just as they did in 2007. Currently, 59% of blacks say they have a positive view of unions, down from 75% three years ago. Just more than a third of whites (37%) express a favorable opinion, down from 54% in 2007.

Labor union favorability among Republicans has dropped from 47% to 29%, while unfavorable opinions have risen from 45% to 58%. Independents show a similar shift (54% favorable in 2007 to 38% now). Democrats remain the most positive about unions – but in smaller numbers: 56% say they have a favorable opinion today, down from 70% in 2007; unfavorable opinions have increased from 19% to 26%.

	<b>Jan 2007</b>		<b>Feb 2010</b>		<b>Change in fav</b>	<b>Feb N</b>
	<b>Fav %</b>	<b>Unfav %</b>	<b>Fav %</b>	<b>Unfav %</b>		
Total	58	31	41	42	-17	1383
Men	57	34	40	49	-17	625
Women	59	29	43	36	-16	758
White	54	36	37	46	-17	1063
Black	75	19	59	26	-16	142
18-29	66	24	53	33	-13	184
30-49	57	32	36	45	-21	374
50-64	50	38	45	42	-5	418
65+	60	28	29	51	-31	393
College grad+	55	38	37	47	-18	495
Some college	61	30	42	40	-19	402
HS or less	58	28	44	40	-14	480
<i>Family income</i>						
\$75,000+	54	42	35	54	-19	392
\$30-\$74,999	57	33	47	40	-10	454
Under \$30,000	65	22	43	36	-22	344
Republican	47	45	29	58	-18	391
Democrat	70	19	56	26	-14	438
Independent	54	34	38	46	-16	472
<i>Union Household</i>						
Yes	77	19	74	22	-3	172
No	54	33	36	45	-18	1197

Q25e. Whites and blacks do not include Hispanics.

One group that has shown virtually no change is union households. Today, 74% of those in union households say they have a favorable view of labor unions; 22% have an unfavorable view. Three years ago, 77% had a favorable view, while 19% had an unfavorable opinion.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), 12.3 percent of wage and salary workers in the United States belonged to unions in 2009. That was comparable to 2008 (12.4%), but down from 20.1% in 1983, the first year when comparable data are available. BLS says that more public sector workers now belong to unions than private sector workers.

### Fewer See Labor Unions as Necessary

Pew Research’s April 2009 survey of the public’s political and social values – see [“Independents Take Center Stage in Obama Era.”](#) May 21, 2009 – found declines in the proportions of independents and Republicans saying labor unions are necessary to protect working people.

	----- Agree -----					99-09 Change
	1999	2002	2003	2007	2009	
	%	%	%	%	%	
Total	70	71	74	68	61	-9
Republican	53	59	62	53	44	-9
Democrat	80	82	83	80	80	0
Independent	73	70	76	67	53	-20

Just 53% of independents agreed that labor unions are necessary to protect working people, down from 67% in 2007 and 73% a decade earlier. Fewer than half of Republicans (44%) agreed with that statement in 2009, down nine points from 2007 (and 1999). Democrats, meanwhile, showed little change over the 10-year period, with at least 80% consistently saying that unions were needed to protect working people each time the question was asked.

In 2009, 82% of African Americans said unions were necessary to protect working people, little changed from 83% a decade earlier. By contrast, the proportion of whites agreeing with this statement fell to 54% in 2009 from 67% in 1999. Labor unions lost support among white men, in particular. Just 47% of white men agreed that labor unions were necessary to protect working people, down from 67% in 2003. Over that same period, the percentage of white women who saw unions as necessary declined by 11 points (from 72% to 61%).

That survey also found an increasing proportion saying labor unions are too powerful. Last year, 61% agreed that unions have too much power, while 33% disagreed. In 1999, the last time this question was asked, the divide was narrower: 52% agreed that unions had too much power; 40% disagreed.

Again, most of the change of opinion came among independents and Republicans. Among independents, 66% said unions had too much power, up from 53% in 1999. Three-

quarters of Republicans (75%) last year said that unions had too much power, up from 65% 10 years earlier. By comparison, 46% of Democrats concurred, which was little changed from 1999 (42%).

## ABOUT THE SURVEY

Results for this survey are based on telephone interviews conducted under the direction of Princeton Survey Research Associates International among a national sample of 1,383 adults living in the continental United States, 18 years of age or older, from February 3-9, 2010 (1,024 respondents were interviewed on a landline telephone, and 359 were interviewed on a cell phone, including 132 who had no landline telephone). Both the landline and cell phone samples were provided by Survey Sampling International. Interviews were conducted in English. 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/ethnicity, region, and population density to parameters from the March 2009 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 2009 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 within the landline sample. Sampling errors and statistical tests of significance take into account the effect of weighting.

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	1,383	3.5 percentage points
Registered voters	1,129	3.5 percentage points
Form 1	678	4.5 percentage points
Form 2	705	4.5 percentage points
Republicans	391	6.0 percentage points
Democrats	438	6.0 percentage points
Independents	472	5.5 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:

Andrew Kohut, Director  
Scott Keeter, Director of Survey Research  
Carroll Doherty and Michael Dimock, Associate Directors  
Michael Remez, Senior Writer  
Robert Suls, Shawn Neidorf, Leah Christian, Jocelyn Kiley and Alec Tyson, Research Associates  
Jacob Poushter, Research Assistant

**PEW RESEARCH CENTER FOR THE PEOPLE & THE PRESS**  
**FEBRUARY 2010 POLITICAL SURVEY**  
**FINAL TOPLINE**  
**February 3-9, 2010**  
**N=1,383**

**QUESTIONS 1-2, 4-5, 8-14, 17-20 25a-d PREVIOUSLY RELEASED**

**NO QUESTIONS 3, 6-7, 15-16, 21-24**

**ASK ALL:**

Q.25 Thinking more generally ... Is your overall opinion of [INSERT ITEM, RANDOMIZE ITEMS a. THROUGH d. FOLLOWED BY RANDOMIZED ITEMS e. THROUGH h. FOLLOWED BY RANDOMIZED ITEMS i. THROUGH k. FOLLOWED BY RANDOMIZED ITEMS l. AND m. LAST] very favorable, mostly favorable, mostly UNfavorable, or very unfavorable? [INTERVIEWERS: PROBE TO DISTINGUISH BETWEEN “NEVER HEARD OF” AND “CAN’T RATE.”] How about [NEXT ITEM]? [IF NECESSARY: would you say your overall opinion of [ITEM] is very favorable, mostly favorable, mostly UNfavorable, or very unfavorable?] [INTERVIEWERS: PROBE TO DISTINGUISH BETWEEN “NEVER HEARD OF” AND “CAN’T RATE.”]

	---- Favorable ----			---- Unfavorable ----			(VOL.) Never	(VOL.) Can't rate/
	<u>Total</u>	<u>Very</u>	<u>Mostly</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Very</u>	<u>Mostly</u>	<u>Heard of</u>	<u>Ref</u>
<b>ASK ALL:</b>								
e. Labor unions								
Feb 3-9, 2010	41	11	30	42	16	26	1	16
January, 2007	58	18	40	31	11	20	2	9
Late March, 2005	56	17	39	33	9	24	1	1
March, 2002	59	15	44	32	9	23	1	8
July, 2001	51	12	39	36	10	26	1	1
March, 2001	63	16	47	28	7	21	1	8
August, 1999	59	12	47	36	9	27	*	5
Early September, 1998	52	12	40	38	13	25	*	1
June, 1997	58	15	43	35	10	25	*	7
May, 1997	49	15	34	39	13	26	*	1
April, 1996	47	10	37	45	17	28	*	8
February, 1996	54	17	37	41	14	27	*	5
July, 1994	57	14	43	38	10	28	*	5
January, 1988	52	10	42	39	10	29	*	9
July, 1985	46	9	37	47	17	30	*	7

**QUESTIONS 25f-h, 25l, 27-42, 48-49, 64-66, 71-73, 75-78 PREVIOUSLY RELEASED**

**NO QUESTIONS 26, 43-47, 50-63, 67-70, 74**

**QUESTIONS 25i-k HELD FOR FUTURE RELEASE**