



THE CONGRESSIONAL INSTITUTE NATIONAL ISSUES SURVEY

**CHARLTON
RESEARCH
COMPANY**

A Public Opinion Study

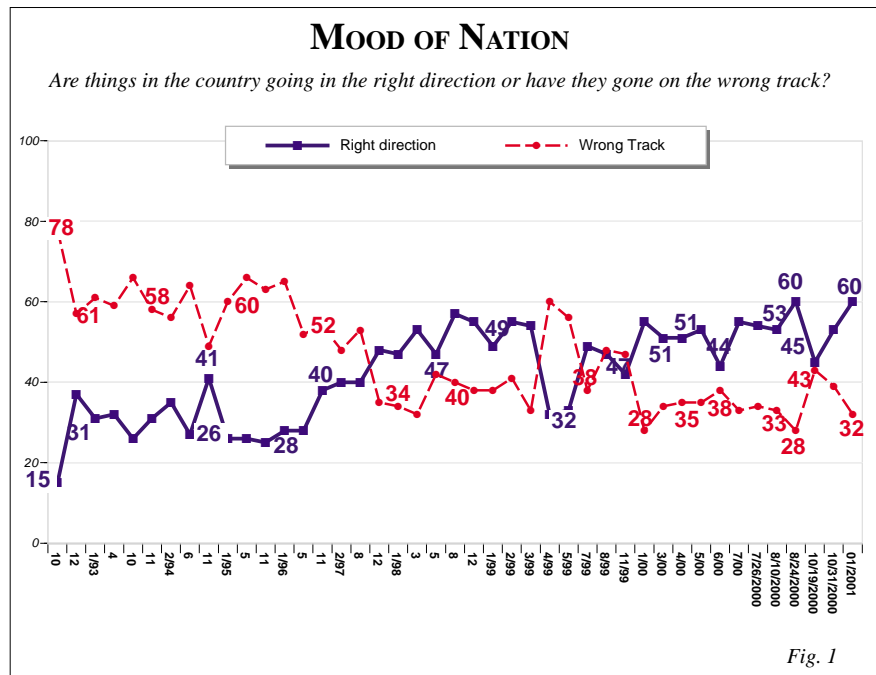
January 2001

This report details the findings of a study conducted by Charlton Research Company on behalf of the Congressional Institute.

POSITIVE BEGINNING FOR BUSH ADMINISTRATION

Just weeks into his new administration, President Bush is enjoying a relatively positive reception from the American public. Currently working for him is a very optimistic national mood. Sixty percent of Americans believe the country is headed in the right direction, while only one-third believe things have gotten off on the wrong track (See Fig 1). Indeed, Americans are registering an optimism rarely seen since Charlton Research Company began tracking the national mood in 1993.

Furthermore, President Bush has made a favorable first impression among Americans. By a ratio of two-to-one, more people mentioned a favorable aspect of his leadership potential (48%) than an unfavorable aspect (24%) (See Fig 2). These respondents expect President Bush to be a good leader, feel he has a strong character, and believe he has surrounded himself with a qualified staff. Sixteen percent of Americans are not sure of the future of President Bush's leadership. Even more positive for Bush is the fact that fifty-nine percent of respondents directly stated that their first impression is more



FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF PRESIDENT BUSH

What are your first impressions of the leadership that President Bush is likely to offer?

	First Mention %	Total Mentions
Favorable Mentions	47	48
Favorable opinion/Like him/General positive mentions	23	23
Will do a good job/A good president	14	18
Good leader/Leadership	6	8
Has good character/Values	3	6
Good cabinet/Staff	2	2
Unfavorable Mentions	24	24
Unfavorable opinion/Dislike him/General negative mentions	16	17
Will not do a good job	4	6
Not Qualified/Poor leader	2	4
Bought/Won election unfairly	1	2
Needs more experience	1	1
Undecided/Need more time/Mixed feelings	16	19
Other	3	4
Don't know	10	10

Fig. 2

positive than negative. This indicates that many of those who are not sure about President Bush's future leadership still hold relatively positive views toward him.

SOCIAL CONCERNS STILL DOMINATE ISSUE STRUCTURE

When asked to identify the single most important issue facing the United States today, nearly two of every three Americans mention some type of social issue including education, health care, crime, abortion, poverty, and social security (See Fig 3). Twenty percent mention economic issues such as the state of the economy, taxes and unemployment. Only a few Americans believe foreign policy issues are the most important facing the country. Social issues have dominated the American landscape since 1993. In fact, it has been the longest period where Americans have concentrated on issues other than the economy and foreign policy since opinion research began tracking it in the 1930s.

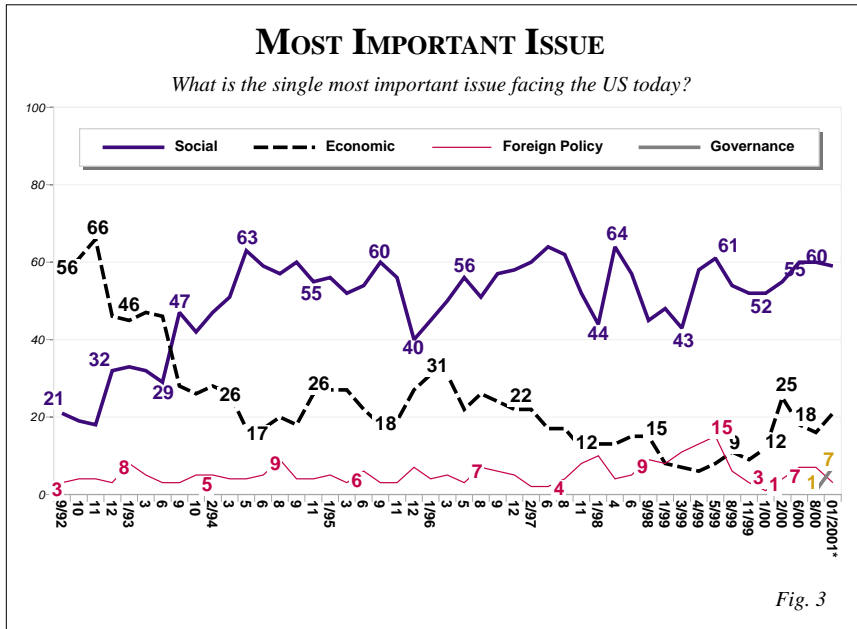


Fig. 3

Interestingly, when asked to name the most important problem for the government to address in the coming year, parity emerges between social and economic issues. According to a recent CBS poll, twenty-nine percent mention some type of social issues, while twenty-three percent mention an economic issue. These response variations may indicate that while people focus on everyday social issues, they look to the government to handle more national issues such as the economy.

The Congressional Institute, in conjunction with Charlton Research Company, has designed a research model which explores the link between people's concern about these important national issues and the public's collective decision-making process. The Public Judgment model refines an idea, initially explored by pollster Daniel Yankelovich, that people in a democratic society continually cycle through a systematic decision-making process on various national issues. The public first becomes aware of an issue and subsequently develops a sense of urgency about it. The public then begins to debate the issue by exploring alternatives, wishing for best-case scenarios and, finally, weighing the pros and cons of the alternatives. The issue becomes mature when the public takes an intellectual stand and ultimately makes a responsible judgment. Applying this model to research data allows us to understand where specific national issues fit into the public's decision-making process, an important step in shaping policy.

In this study, thirteen of the nation's top issues were tested to determine generally where the public stood. While not all Americans are in the same stage on each issue, the issues did roughly fall into four quadrants on the Public Judgment Model. Each quadrant identifies the public's level of decision-making knowledge in relation to their desire for action on the issue (See Fig 4 on next page).

Four issues fall into Quadrant 1: making sure every American has the education needed to find a job, requiring lighter, more fuel-efficient cars, reforming the voting system, and encouraging industry to be more environmentally responsible. The public believes that these issues need to be addressed soon, but it has not decided on the best action to take. Quadrant 2, which includes making sure all Americans have health insurance, improving the local environment, and cutting taxes, indicates that people have thought about these issues and the actions that should be taken to address them.

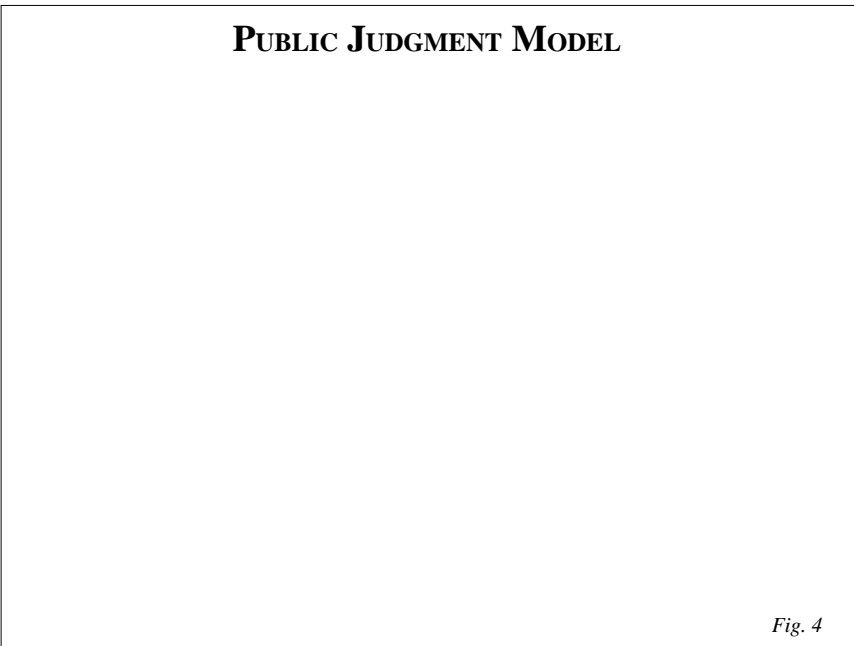


Fig. 4

The lower quadrants include issues that Americans do not believe need to be acted on as quickly as those in upper quadrants. Quadrant 3 includes partial privatization of social security, building a missile defense system, and using business standards rather than regulations. Americans have moved forward in the decision process on these issues, but do not believe immediate action is as important. Finally, Quadrant 4, which includes expediting trade agreements, establishing a bipartisan commission to modernize the EPA, and encouraging the government to use scientific findings to devise regulations, suggests that Americans have a low knowledge of these issues and do not have a sense of action urgency.

These issues fell in similar order of action when respondents directly ranked which ones they wanted the new Congress to address (See Fig 5). Enhancing the education system was mentioned by thirty-two percent of respondents, followed by ensuring all Americans have health insurance and cutting in individual taxes.

ISSUES RANKING

Which issue is most important for the new Congress to address?

	First Mention %	Second Mention %	Total Mentions %
Enhancing the education system	32	20	52
Ensuring all Americans have health insurance	24	18	42
Cuts in individuals' income taxes	13	11	24
Improving the quality of the environment	9	16	25
Allowing individuals personal control over some of their social security investments	9	11	19
Reforming the voter registration, voting and vote counting system	5	7	12
Expediting international trade to enhance US competitiveness	3	5	8
Building a missile defense system	3	5	8
Don't know	2	2	2

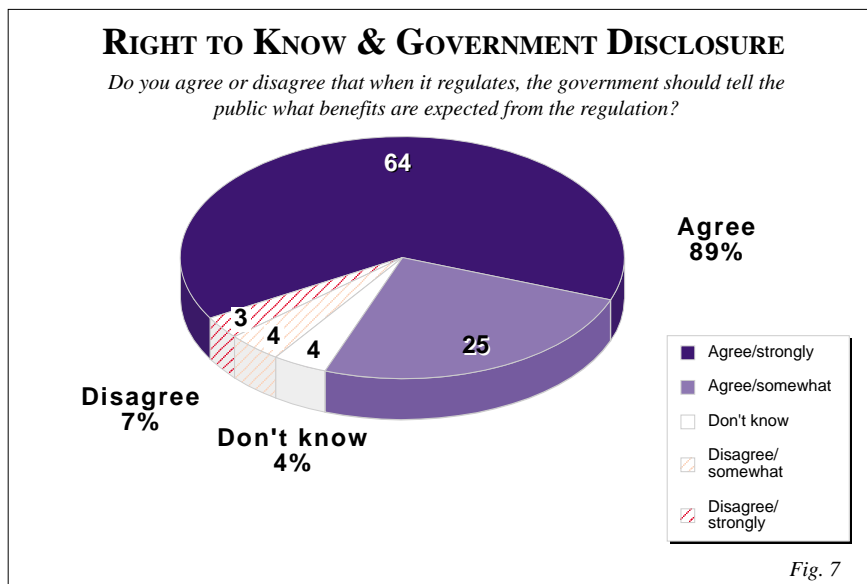
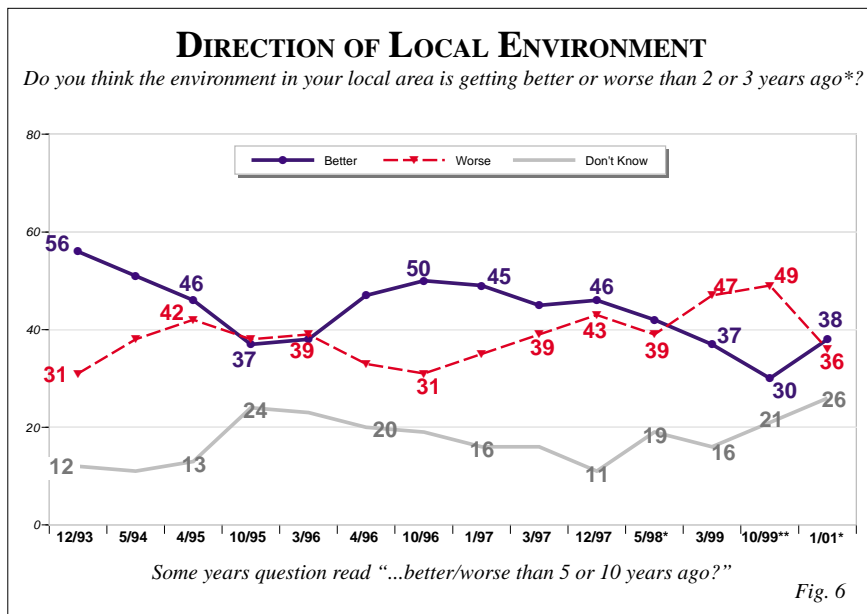
Fig. 5

AMERICANS MORE POSITIVE TOWARD STATE OF ENVIRONMENT AND THEY OVERWHELMINGLY AGREE WITH RISK ASSESSMENT TOOLS

As it has since 1992, air and water pollution remains at the top of Americans' list of most important environmental issues facing the nation today. Over half of respondents identify some type of pollution as their top concern (53%), followed by ongoing damage to the environment (13%), toxic waste and chemicals (8%), and government/society (2%).

Despite these environmental concerns, Americans enjoy a relatively positive attitude toward the direction of their local environment. Thirty-eight percent of Americans indicated that the environment in their local area is getting better than during the last two or three years, while thirty-six percent believe it is becoming worse (See Fig 6). This represents an upswing from a low point reached in October 1999.

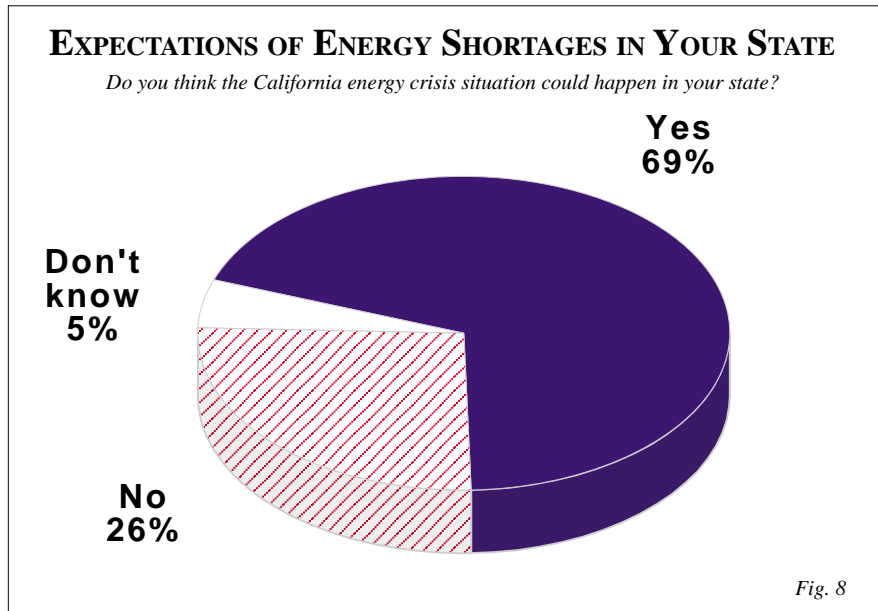
Even with this relatively positive mood, a majority of Americans believe the environment should be regulated more. Fifty-five percent agree that there should be more regulation of the environment, while thirty-nine percent believe it is regulated enough. Yet Americans clearly believe the government should employ risk assessment strategies when creating environmental regulations. In fact, an overwhelming eighty percent believe that using risk assessments to estimate risk levels and to rank environmental problems is a good idea. Furthermore, eighty-one percent believe cost-benefit analyses to identify worthwhile programs is a good idea. Eighty percent agree with the use of comparative risk assessments to determine environmental resource allocation. Finally, nine-in-ten Americans believe that the public has a right to know the benefits of proposed environmental regulations (See Fig 7).



OTHER NATIONAL ISSUES

Energy Crisis A Growing Issue Across the Nation—The energy crisis gripping California has received a significant amount of attention from the American public. Indeed, three-quarters of Americans have heard about the national natural gas shortage, and eighty-six percent have heard about the electricity shortage in California.

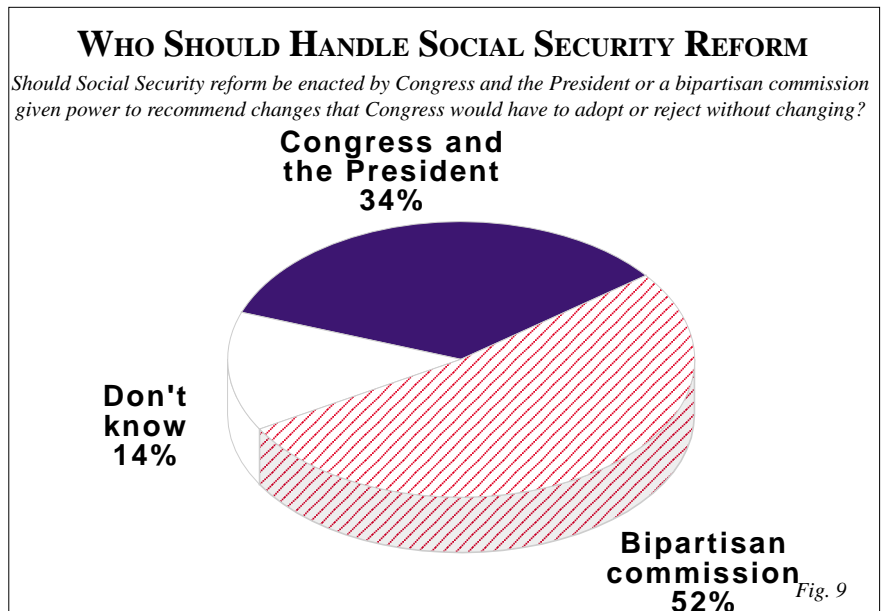
With this level of attention, the energy crisis has the potential to become the top issue facing the country. Nearly four-in-ten Americans indicate they have already been affected by the national energy shortage. More importantly, sixty-nine percent believe California's energy crisis situation could happen in their state (See Fig 8).



Americans Favor More Open Trade Policy—Just over half of Americans indicate they favor eliminating some of the barriers that exist to international trade, such as reducing tariffs, to promote increased international trade.

Bipartisan Commission Trusted to Fix Elections—Nearly three-quarters of Americans would prefer to have a bipartisan commission, rather than Congress, work with local, state, and federal officials to reform election laws and voter registration systems.

Social Security Gains Should Remain With Families—Fifty-two percent of the public says that a bipartisan commission should be used, rather than Congress and the President, to reform the social security system (See Fig 9). If the system allowed for partial private investment, eighty-three percent believes any savings not used by a worker should be given to his/her family upon the worker's death rather than to the government to help others.



Americans Paying Attention to Private Investments in Record Numbers—Nearly two-thirds of Americans indicate they currently hold investments in the form of stocks, mutual funds, 401K accounts, and IRAs. This awareness level of private investments has significantly increased over the last twenty years. Though further analysis is needed, it suggests that, along with inflation and unemployment rates, private investment earnings could become a third economic indicator that affects people's perception of public policy.

METHODOLOGY

A telephone survey lasting approximately 24 minutes was conducted among 800 adults nationwide from January 19-25, 2001. This sample size, which was proportionate to the country's demographic composition, including geography, gender, voter registration and ethnicity, yields a $\pm 3.5\%$ margin of error.

The Congressional Institute played a major role in the design and analysis of this research project. For questions or comments, please contact Jerry Climer at (202) 547-4600.



316 Pennsylvania Avenue, Suite 403 • Washington, D.C. 20003 • 202/547-4600 • 202/547-3556 fax
www.conginst.org

Charlton Research Company is a research and consulting firm which has been developing strategies for business, political, and legal clients since 1983. The company specializes in analyzing changes in today's socio-political and economic environments. To obtain a copy of our publications dealing with these issues, or to learn more about Charlton Research Company's capabilities and research models, please contact Chuck Rund at (202) 530-0010.



CHARLTON RESEARCH COMPANY

1460 Maria Lane, Suite 410 • Walnut Creek, CA 94596 • 925/274-5900 • 925/937-9895 fax
1612 K Street, NW, Suite 800 • Washington, D.C. 20006 • 202/530-0010 • 202/530-0039 fax
www.charltonresearch.com