AN EXAMINATION OF PRESIDENTIAL APPROVAL BASED ON THE PRESIDENT’S HANDLING OF SPECIFIC ISSUES AND A ROADMAP TO INFLUENCING THE PUBLIC’S OPINION OF THE PRESIDENT

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By

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ABSTRACT

The extent to which the public approves of how the President is handling his job has a significant impact on the President’s ability to persuade others to support his policies and ideas. Studying what factors, particularly how the public views his handling of specific issues, influence the public’s perception of the President overall enables a better understanding of the makeup of presidential approval.

The President’s approval rating typically follows a number of patterns based on outside events. The honeymoon effect, rally around the flag effect, and approval based on the status of the economy have been seen during virtually all presidencies since job approval polling began in the 1930s. This analysis delves further into the causes of presidential approval rating increases or decreases by studying what effect the President’s handling of specific issues, such as the war in Iraq and the economy, has on his overall approval rating utilizing data from a Pew Research poll from May 2005. Further, by examining the public’s answers to questions related to economic issues that are at least partly within the President’s control, it is possible to decipher a roadmap of what should be emphasized in order to sway approval of the President.
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INTRODUCTION

The President’s job approval ratings directly impact his ability to accomplish his policy and political goals. When a President has a low approval rating, he faces strong resistance from the opposition party who seek to capitalize on his weakness. He also loses some of his ability to lead his own party and pressure members into supporting and advocating his proposals, as Members of Congress and state and local officials worry the public’s opinion of the President will hamper them during the next election. In other words, the President’s job approval rating determines the extent to which he is able to use the Office of the President to induce others both political parties to support his policies for the nation.

Since the President’s approval ratings are so crucial to the accomplishment of his policy agenda, it is important to determine what influences those ratings. With the knowledge of what factors raise job approval ratings, a President could focus on those issues to bring up his ratings and thereby ensure support of his agenda. Such action may strike some as phony or pandering to the public, a belief I do not argue with. But, the knowledge of what factors influence job approval ratings would enable the President to tailor his actions to secure the passage of his proposals – plans he is convinced will significantly help the country.

I use polling data from Pew Research to analyze the factors that influence a President’s job approval rating. By utilizing a poll that asks the public’s opinion of the President’s handling of his job overall, as well as his handling of various issues, such as
the economy, foreign policy, and the environment, I can determine the effect of increased public favorability toward the job a President does on a specific issue. People often state that issues like the environment are important to them, but this analysis enables me to uncover if the environment does actually matter to people’s opinions of the President.

I utilize data from a Pew Research poll conducted in May of 2005, that asks a variety of questions about the President’s job approval for different issues, as well as includes a variety of other questions related to economics and demographics. The data I examine contains over 1500 responses – a large enough number to insure that I have the best chance possible at finding statistically significant results.

While such analysis can be used to nefariously inflate a President’s approval ratings for political gains, it also could be used to determine what issues the public truly values and help the President successfully implement policies he believes will benefit the American people. Presidential approval ratings play a significant role in the media’s coverage, a fact that cannot be overlooked. Since ratings are broadcasted in a widespread manner, it is important to study them and determine what influences them.
BACKGROUND

The first measurement of the public’s approval of a President’s performance was conducted by Gallup in the late 1930s assessing Franklin Delano Roosevelt. The “Presidential Approval Rating” question became a polling standard during Harry Truman’s administration and has been a consistent gauge ever since. A President’s approval rating is determined by the percentage of survey respondents answering yes to the question “Do you approve or disapprove of the way [current President’s name] is handling his job as president?” The question is now asked in all polls and used by the media and the public as the marquee measure of the President’s power.

A President’s approval rating is directly related to his capacity to accomplish his policy and political goals. A President with a low approval rating faces strong opposition to his ideas and proposal by the other political party, as they see an opportunity to capitalize on his weakness. A President with a low approval rating also suffers in his standing with his own party and has decreased power to pressure Members of Congress and Governors into supporting and advocating his proposals. Politicians in his party worry the public’s low opinion of the President will hamper them during the next election and could cost them their jobs. The President’s job approval rating is extremely important to him and the nation, as it determines the extent to which he is able to use the bully pulpit and the Office of the President to persuade members of both his political party and the opposition to support his policies for the nation. Additionally, foreign leaders may exploit the President’s position of weakness by acting contrary to
U.S. foreign policy interests during a time when they believe the President will be incapable of responding strongly.

The media and much of the public pay very close attention to the President’s approval rating. In fact, it is the most frequently used indication of the President’s power and political support. It has also been shown to be a strong predictor of the President’s likelihood of being reelected (Lewis-Beck and Rice 1982; Brody and Sigelman 1983). While the trend of each President’s approval rating is different and specific ratings also vary at different times in his presidency, there are a number of commonalities in the patterns of presidential approval for all Presidents since pollsters first began asking the question.

Every President since presidential approval has been measured has begun his presidency with a relatively high level of support that eventually diminishes, an effect commonly referred to as the “Honeymoon” period. At first, when the President is inaugurated, he is seen in a completely positive light. He has not yet done anything to upset anyone. In effect, each person sees him as a blank slate and imagines him acting in a manner he or she would approve of. In addition to each person’s desire to view the President and his possible future actions optimistically, he also receives little to no public criticism. The opposition party routinely holds its fire during the transition and inauguration phases “out of respect” for the new President. With no criticism available, the media provides purely positive stories about the President, his family, and the new administration. The media also wishes to insure access to the new administration and
avoid creating enemies from the start, so they refrain from critical coverage of the
President. The public sees the lack of negativity (or even upbeat coverage) in the media
and receives the cue to support the President (Brody 1990).

There are two prominent theories as to why the “Honeymoon” fades and
approval declines as time passes. One possibility is that the high expectations of the
President are so unreasonable, he inevitably will do something to anger or disappoint
his some of his original supporters. When he acts in a manner that upsets his
supporters, his support declines (Mueller 1973). Also, as time goes on and the
President’s agenda becomes clearer, those who withheld judgment following the
president’s inauguration switch from uncertain to disapproving of the president.
Another theory posits that the approval level during the “Honeymoon” period is
artificially high and the decline simply brings the President down to his true approval
rate (Kernell 1978).

Following major international events and crises, Presidents experience a surge in
their approval ratings, often referred to as the “rally round the flag” effect. One theory
posits that people want to unite behind their President and want to believe he will make
America proud. They look to the President to keep them safe and successfully navigate
the crisis. They believe it is their patriotic duty to express support of the President.
Another theory (Brody 1990) argues that the surge in approval following an
international incident is the result of the characteristics of an international crisis, which
is by its very nature is unpredictable and rapidly changing, where information is not
released and debated in the typical manner. The President and his administration have complete control over the information about the situation, driving opposition political leaders to refrain from negative commenting. Normal contentious debate disappears leading the media to cover the story from the administration’s point of view. Brody maintains that it is the lack of negative or conflicting media coverage that causes the president’s approval rating to increase. The public does not see any criticism of the president in the media or from those who typically question his actions. They begin to view the one-sidedness of media reports as an indication that the president is doing his job well.

The “rally round the flag” effect usually is evident immediately following the start of wars, but it can also occur during other major incidents. President Kennedy received a bump associated with the Cuban Missile Crisis, and Reagan saw an increase following the US invasion of Grenada. By far, one of the highest ratings and biggest approval jumps ever recorded belongs to George H. W. Bush shortly after the start of the Gulf War in 1991 when he was supported by 87 percent of Americans. As George H. W. Bush’s unsuccessful reelection exhibits, the “rally round the flag” effect is not permanent. When the threat is defeated or a war becomes seen as unsuccessful or not winnable, the President’s approval rating falls back to where it began or sinks even lower. President Carter fell victim to this drop during the Iran Hostage crisis. His approval had increased during the Camp David accords (which were seen as progress toward peace in the Middle East) and at the start of the hostage crisis. But, as time went
on and public opinion shifted about the hostage situation and his handing of it, President Carter’s support tumbled and he lost the 1980 election to Ronald Reagan.

Obviously, September 11th changed the way America looked at President Bush. The percentage of Americans approving of Bush's job performance shot up from 51 percent in the Gallup poll on September 10, 2001 to an astonishing 86 percent in the September 15th poll. This change was the largest shift of presidential approval ever reported by Gallup in its entire history. In a 2004 study, Robb Willer found that Bush also received a bump in approval of an average of approximately 3 points every time a terror alert was issued between 2001 and 2004. He was repeatedly benefiting from the “rally round the flag” effect every time a new terror alert was announced and people became fearful for their safety.

The economy is also seen to have a significant impact on presidential approval ratings. Political commentators often say that Americans vote with their pocketbooks – well, they also judge the President based on the positive or negative qualities of the current economy. Even though the President has a limited influence on the state of the economy, he benefits and suffers from its ups and downs. When the economy is humming along with little unemployment or inflation and people are earning good money for their work, the President’s ratings climb. However, when unemployment or inflation goes up or wages seem to go down, the President is blamed and his approval plummets. Americans do not blame the President (or reward him) for their own
personal economic situation, but rather for the state of the economy as a whole (Kinder and Kiewiet 1979).

The public is somewhat forward-thinking when looking at the economy and evaluating the President. They don’t look to past economic performance – they approve of the President based on their expectations of the nation’s future economic health (MacKuen et al 1992). Consumer confidence and “leading economic indicators” ratings closely mirror presidential approval for all Presidents.

While some common trends and explanations (honeymoon effect, rally round the flag effects, and approval based on the status of the economy) help explain presidential job approval ratings, there is more study to be done. Other causes of the improvement or decline of approval figures are yet to be discovered. It is still unclear what effect specific issues have on the President’s support in the country.

While an analysis to determine the factors that influence presidential approval can be used by the President or his staff to artificially boost his approval ratings, it also could be used to decipher what issues the public truly values and assist the President in passing and implementing the policies he believes will benefit the American people. With the knowledge of what factors raise job approval ratings, a President could focus on those issues to bring up his ratings and thereby ensure support of his agenda. Such action may strike some as phony or pandering to the public. But, the knowledge of what factors influence job approval ratings would enable the President to tailor his
actions to secure the passage of his proposals – plans he is convinced will significantly help the country.
METHODOLOGY

The dependent variable in my analysis is the President’s job approval rating, which indicates whether a respondent approves or disapproves of the job the President is doing overall. I believe the factors affecting the President’s job approval rating include, but are not limited to, the respondent’s political party, economic situation, media coverage viewed, and opinion of the President’s handling of specific issues. Each of those factors is also affected by even more factors that can be measured in more specific ways. However, I focus my study on the effect of the public’s approval or disapproval of the President’s handling of a variety of issues – the economy, the situation in Iraq, terrorist threats, the nation’s foreign policy, the environment, energy policy, and Social Security. Additionally, I examine the role that the economy as a whole and specific economically related issues (that the President has some degree of control over) in approval of the President.

The data I use for my analysis comes from survey that was conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates for the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press. Pew interviewed 1502 Americans, age 18 and above, by telephone using random digit dialing from May 11 – May 15, 2005. For more details and complete question wording, the questionnaire has been included in the appendix.

I utilize a stepdisc regression with approval or disapproval of the President’s job as my dependent variable (“Do you approve or disapprove of the way George W. Bush is handling his job as President?”). The independent variables I am most interested in
studying are the approval or disapproval of the President’s handling of the economy, the situation in Iraq, terrorist threats, the nation’s foreign policy, the environment, energy policy, and Social Security. Analyzing the effect of the approval on those issues enables me to determine which, if any, really cause changes in the President’s overall opinion rating – a number crucial for the President to be successful in his job. I also use other economic measures that the President can influence slightly as independent variables to provide a roadmap for how the President or his opponents can sway approval ratings.
RESULTS

Model: Approval of the President’s Handling of Issues

In order to examine the factors influencing the public’s opinion of the President and ways he can improve his standing, a good starting point is the public’s approval of his handling of issues he faces in the course of his daily work. Utilizing approval of the President’s handling of the nation’s economy, the situation in Iraq, terrorist threats, the nation’s foreign policy, the environment, energy policy, and Social Security, it is possible to correctly classify 91.4% of those who don’t approve of the President overall (see table 1). Classifying over 9 out of 10 of those disapproving of the President’s performance correctly is quite notable, as it means that the public’s approval of the President’s handling of issues is a remarkable driver for the public’s support overall.

Table 1: Correct classification based on model of the President’s handling of the nation’s economy, the situation in Iraq, terrorist threats, the nation’s foreign policy, the environment, energy policy, and Social Security

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Observations and Percent Classified into Presidential Approval</th>
<th>Don’t Approve of President</th>
<th>Approve of President</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Don’t Approve of President</td>
<td>372</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>407</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>91.4%</td>
<td>8.60%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approve of President</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>290</td>
<td>337</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.95%</td>
<td>86.05%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>419</td>
<td>325</td>
<td>744</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56.32%</td>
<td>43.68%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Through a stepdisc regression (table 2), the economy is seen as the issue most affecting presidential approval, with a partial r-square of .477. This finding is similar to what would be expected based on historical trends. The economy and its future prospects greatly influence the public’s feelings about a President. The second most influential subject is the President’s job in handling the situation in Iraq (partial r-square of .2203).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Partial R-Square</th>
<th>F Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Approve of President on economy</td>
<td>0.4770</td>
<td>676.75*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Approve of President on Iraq</td>
<td>0.2203</td>
<td>209.35*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Approve of President on the environment</td>
<td>0.0862</td>
<td>69.78*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Approve of President on terrorist threats</td>
<td>0.0544</td>
<td>42.55*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Approve of President on foreign policy</td>
<td>0.0263</td>
<td>19.95*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Approve of President on Social Security</td>
<td>0.0105</td>
<td>7.79**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Approve of President on energy policy</td>
<td>0.0040</td>
<td>2.98***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Significant at p<.0001; **p<.01; ***p<.1.
Based on the T-test, all seven variables are significantly different from each other.

The Iraq War and its progress (or lack thereof) is a circumstance unique to President Bush, making it more difficult to interpret the meaning of its importance. With the start of combat, President Bush experienced the ‘rally around the flag’ phenomenon, where his approval rating climbed because of an international incident. However, on May 1, 2003, Bush stood in front of a “Mission Accomplished” banner and declared major combat operations were over, signaling to the American people that
the threat to the nation and its soldiers had diminished. The rally then began to fade and
President Bush’s approval numbers began to decline. But, to some, it is still important
to support the President while American troops are overseas, and others have grown
angry over the lack of security in Iraq.

The other variables in the model (approval of the President’s handling of the
environment, terrorist threats, foreign policy, Social Security, and energy policy) do
help shape presidential approval, but to a lesser degree than the economy and Iraq.
Issues such as Social Security and the environment are important, but people consider
the economy to be the most pressing matter facing their families.

The public’s approval of the President’s handling of issues of importance to
Americans, such as the economy and terrorism, determines presidential approval to a
very large degree. Approval of the President’s handing of the nation’s economy, the
situation in Iraq, terrorist threats, the nation’s foreign policy, the environment, energy
policy, and Social Security, provides the potential to correctly classify 91.4% of those
who don’t approve of the President overall. While they provide the opportunity to
classify so many people correctly, these variables are not able to be directly influenced
by those in power and those seeking power. In order to provide a better roadmap to the
ways in which presidential approval might be swayed or influenced, it is crucial to also
examine topics that a President or others in power have at least a small degree of control
over.
*Model: General Economic Measures*

As was illustrated earlier, the perceived strength of the economy and the President’s handling of it are the most important factors in determining approval of the President overall. Measures of the economy, while not entirely under the President’s control, are influenced by his actions. For instance, passing a budget that increases the national debt often leads to higher interest rates which slows the economy. Presidents can also pass stimulus bills aimed at boosting the economy, as President Clinton did shortly after taking office. The tools of the presidency enable the President to shape, though not completely control, the nation’s economy.

In this model, I have included four general economic measures that the President has at least some degree of influence over. The economic variables included in this model (rate the nation’s economy as good, expect the nation’s economy to be better in a year, expect personal finances to have improved in a year, and the country is making progress in availability of good-paying jobs) are a good predictor of presidential approval. With the four variables, one can correctly classify 78.62% of those who don’t approve of the President (see table 3). In other words, by using only these variables to predict presidential approval, only 21.38% of those who don’t approve of the President would be misclassified.
Table 3: Correct classification based on model of opinion of the state of the economy, expectation of economy to be better in a year, expectation of personal finances to have improved in a year, and opinion of whether country is making progress in availability of good-paying jobs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Observations and Percent Classified into Presidential Approval</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Don’t Approve of President</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t Approve of President</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approve of President</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Using a stepdisc regression, I find that, of the four variables included in this model, giving the economy good marks matters the most in determining presidential approval, followed by expecting the economy to improve in the next year, expecting one’s personal finances to improve in the next year, and believing that the country is making progress in the availability of good-paying jobs (see table 4). The overall health of the economy colors citizens’ views of the President. If the economy is thriving, the President receives the credit, and if people believe the economy to be failing, the President is blamed.

Table 4: Stepdisc Regression – Model: General Economic Measures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Partial R-Square</th>
<th>F Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Rate economy as good</td>
<td>0.1211</td>
<td>206.71*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Expect better economy in a year</td>
<td>0.0617</td>
<td>98.53*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Expect personal finances to have improved in a year</td>
<td>0.0081</td>
<td>12.23**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Country is making progress in availability of good-paying jobs</td>
<td>0.0054</td>
<td>8.17**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Significant at p<.0001; **p<.01.
Based on the T-test, all four variables are significantly different from each other.
The literature on presidential approval predicts that the state of the economy overall and its future prospects matter more to people than their current financial situation when determining approval of the President – a theory that is confirmed by the findings of the stepdisc procedure. This model finds the current and future health of the economy are the largest determinants of approval. When a variable measuring a person’s opinion of his or her personal current financial situation was included in the model, the stepdisc procedure removed it, as it was not a statistically significant influence of presidential approval. However, one’s future personal financial circumstance does influence people in that it also includes a measure of one’s hypothesis about the direction of the economy. It is hard to imagine many people thinking their financial situation will be better in a year if they also think the economy is about to go into a recession. The belief that the country is making progress toward gaining jobs that provide good salaries is also a determinant of presidential approval, but less substantially than the other variables. It is indicative of the economy overall, but it is less predictive than the others because it is not a perfect measure of the economic health of the country, as the country does not necessarily have to be increasing the number of good-paying jobs in order to have an thriving economy.

As can be seen in table 5, 17.21% of those who don’t approve of the President rate the nation’s economy as good or excellent. However, 49.78% of people who give the President a positive rating also give the economy good marks – a difference of 32.6%. There is a great opportunity to improve the President’s approval ratings by
improving the economy or simply convincing the public of that fact. There is also a large disparity in future expectations of the economy, with only 7.48% of those not approving of the President anticipating an improved economy in a year and 31.49% of those approving of the President’s job performance also thinking that the economy will improve. These economic numbers should be quite troublesome to the President, as a majority of Americans, and even a majority of his supporters, do not believe that the U.S. economy is in good health and that the country’s financial situation is poised to improve in the next year. The large disparity of opinions of the country’s economic well-being and future prospects between those who approve and don’t approve of the President provides an opportunity for the President to improve his approval numbers (or the Democrats to drive them down). By highlighting indications of the strength of the economy and using the bully pulpit to draw attention to the ways in which the economy is performing well (low unemployment, for example), the public’s attitude toward the economy will improve, and an increase in the President’s approval will follow. Alternatively, Democrats can diminish approval of the President by publicizing the failures of the economy and the hazards and threats it faces in the future, such as the failure of wages to increase with inflation and the impact of globalization.

Americans are optimistic about their own futures – a majority of both those who approve of the President and those who do not anticipate a better financial situation in the next year. However, there is a 16.7% difference between the two groups, with 70.3% of approving Americans expecting improved personal finances and 53.6% of
those disapproving anticipating a better personal financial situation. Most Americans, regardless of their feelings about the President do not believe that the country is making progress in the availability of good-paying jobs. Of those who don’t approve of the job the President is doing, only 8.2% think the nation is making progress toward increasing the number of jobs with high wages. Even among those who approve of the President, only 23.2% believe the country is making progress toward this goal. These numbers are so low that any perceived increase in progress is bound to help the President and his approval rating.

Table 5: Percentage of General Economic Measures by Approval of President

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Approve of President</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rate economy as good</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>828</td>
<td>17.21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rate economy as good</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>674</td>
<td>49.78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rate economy as good</td>
<td>Difference</td>
<td></td>
<td>32.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expect better economy in a year</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>828</td>
<td>7.48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expect better economy in a year</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>674</td>
<td>31.49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expect better economy in a year</td>
<td>Difference</td>
<td></td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expect personal finances to have improved in a year</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>828</td>
<td>53.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expect personal finances to have improved in a year</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>674</td>
<td>70.29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expect personal finances to have improved in a year</td>
<td>Difference</td>
<td></td>
<td>16.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country is making progress in availability of good-paying jobs</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>828</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country is making progress in availability of good-paying jobs</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>674</td>
<td>23.18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country is making progress in availability of good-paying jobs</td>
<td>Difference</td>
<td></td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Model: Economically Related Variables that the President Can Influence

There are certain things that, no matter what the President does, he cannot change. The President has absolutely no power over variables such as gender and religion. But, there are other opinion, circumstances, and beliefs that the President does have the power to shift or shape. The President can create new programs to address the affordability of health care coverage, publicize existing programs to make home ownership available to those with lower incomes, or bring an issue like saving for retirement to the forefront. These presidential tools can have a significant impact on people’s opinion of the President, as will be demonstrated in the next paragraphs.

By creating a model with a number of variables that are to some extent tied to economics and that the President has at least some degree of control over, it is possible to correctly classify 78.38% of those who don’t approve of the President (see table 6). The measures included in this model include: rating the economy as good or excellent, expectation of a better economy next year, belief that the job situation is a problem for the U.S. economy, belief that housing in one’s community is affordable, expectation that one’s personal financial situation will improve in the next year, belief that the federal budget deficit is a problem for the economy, concern about not being able to afford medical care for a sick family member in the next year, home ownership, not being able to afford needed health care in the past year, not being able to afford gas or transportation costs in the past year, concern about losing one’s job, and concern about not having enough money for retirement.
Table 6: Correct classification based on model of economically related variables the President can influence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Don’t Approve of President</th>
<th>Approve of President</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Don’t Approve of President</td>
<td>649</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>828</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>78.38%</td>
<td>21.62%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approve of President</td>
<td>224</td>
<td>450</td>
<td>674</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33.23%</td>
<td>66.77%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>873</td>
<td>629</td>
<td>1502</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>58.12%</td>
<td>41.88%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Through a stepdisc regression (see table 7), the current economic health of the country and its future prospects can be seen to be the strongest determinants of presidential approval, as was the case in the earlier model. The belief that the current job situation is a problem for the nation’s economy has a partial r-square of .041 – indicating that is also influences people’s opinion of the President. The President could address the job situation substantively by actually working to create new jobs, or he could use his position to advertise that unemployment is low and give press conferences about the ways in which the economy and the job situation are actually doing well (regardless of whether that is actually the case). The Democrats, on the other hand, could use the argument that our economy is in trouble because of the job situation in order to drive down the President’s approval ratings.

The belief that housing in affordable in one’s area also helps determine approval of the President, but it is not as influential as the current and future shape of the economy. While the President cannot control the actual price of homes for sale, he can
encourage use of government and private programs to aid the lower and middle classes with down payment assistance and loan options and make housing seem more affordable. He may also be able to slightly influence interest rates by decreasing or eliminating the budget deficit, making home ownership more affordable because of lower monthly payments.

The other variables in this model influence presidential approval, albeit in small amounts. But, that does not diminish their importance. By targeting a key few of these issues, the President can swing his approval quite dramatically. The President need not even pass new legislation to improve his standing – he can achieve the same goal by simply convincing people that the situations is improving or that there are existing government solutions and programs not being utilized. Ideally, the President would actually solve the problem in order to get the bump in approval, but realistically, that may not always be the case. In fact, sometimes it might be necessary for the President to use his position and ability to get a message out in order to increase his approval so that he will have the political capital to actually pass a bill addressing the issue in question.
Table 7: Stepdisc Regression – Model: economically related variables the President can influence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Partial R-Square</th>
<th>F Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Rate economy as good</td>
<td>0.1211</td>
<td>206.71*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Expect better economy in a year</td>
<td>0.0617</td>
<td>98.53*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Job situation is a problem for economy</td>
<td>0.0410</td>
<td>63.96*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Housing is affordable</td>
<td>0.0108</td>
<td>16.32*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Expect personal finances to have improved in a year</td>
<td>0.0074</td>
<td>11.19**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Federal deficit is a problem for economy</td>
<td>0.0053</td>
<td>7.90**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Concerned about being able to afford health care for sick relative</td>
<td>0.0046</td>
<td>6.97**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Own home</td>
<td>0.0035</td>
<td>5.25***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Couldn’t afford health care at point in last year</td>
<td>0.0037</td>
<td>5.55***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Couldn’t afford gas at point in last year</td>
<td>0.0052</td>
<td>7.84**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Concerned about losing job</td>
<td>0.0024</td>
<td>3.53****</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Concerned about not enough money for retirement</td>
<td>0.0038</td>
<td>5.67***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Significant at p<.0001; **p<.01; ***p<.05; ****p<.1. 
Based on the T-test, all variables are significantly different from each other.

Conclusions

Through a stepdisc regression, I was able to demonstrate that the President’s handling of the economy was the most important factor, followed by his handling of the war in Iraq, in shaping the public’s opinion of the President. This finding, as well as the results from a model with general economic variables, confirm the common wisdom that the country’s economic health and future prospects are the strongest determinate of presidential approval. The President sinks or swims mostly based on the strength of the economy. However, that does not mean that the President or his opposition has no way of manipulating presidential approval. Using only variables that can be influenced by
the President, I found that they each could shape the public’s opinion of the President. Alone each individual variable did not have a great deal of influence, but by combining a couple of issues, the President’s approval could be shifted fairly considerably.

The lesson for those in the White House and those who oppose the President is that approval can be directed in one direction or another by focusing on economic issues that are within the President’s control. The President can increase his standing with the public by either implementing new programs to fix the problems or simply employing the media to argue that the situation has improved and the problems either don’t exist anymore or have lessened in severity. The President’s opposition can use the same findings to shrink his approval by calling attention to those economic areas where the President is weak.
APPENDIX

PEW RESEARCH CENTER FOR THE PEOPLE & THE PRESS

MAY 2005 NEWS INTEREST INDEX

FINAL QUESTIONNAIRE

Hello, I am _______ calling for Princeton Survey Research Associates in Princeton, New Jersey. We are conducting a telephone opinion survey for leading newspapers and TV stations around the country.

HOUSEHOLD SELECTION EXPERIMENT:

HALF SAMPLE: I'd like to ask a few questions of the YOUNGEST MALE, 18 years of age or older, who is now at home. [IF NO MALE, ASK: May I please speak with the OLDEST FEMALE, 18 years of age or older, who is now at home?]

HALF SAMPLE: I'd like to ask a few questions of the YOUNGEST MALE, 18 years of age or older, who is now at home. [IF NO MALE, ASK: May I please speak with the YOUNGEST FEMALE, 18 years of age or older, who is now at home?]

Q.1 Do you approve or disapprove of the way George W. Bush is handling his job as president? [IF DK ENTER AS DK. IF DEPENDS PROBE ONCE WITH: Overall do you approve or disapprove of the way George W. Bush is handling his job as president? IF STILL DEPENDS ENTER AS DK] (3-05)
ASK FORM 1:

Q.2F1 What do you think is the most important problem facing the country today?

[RECORD VERBATIM RESPONSE. PROBE FOR CLARITY – DO NOT PROBE FOR ADDITIONAL MENTIONS. IF MORE THAN ONE MENTION, RECORD ALL IN ORDER OF MENTION] {1-05}

1 Answer given – RECORD UP TO THREE RESPONSES

8 None/No problem

9 Don’t know/No answer

ASK FORM 2:

Q.3F2 What is the biggest problem facing you and your family these days? [OPEN END. RECORD VERBATIM RESPONSE. PROBE FOR CLARITY. IF MORE THAN ONE MENTION, RECORD ALL IN ORDER OF MENTION] {2-04}

1 Gave Response
ASK FORM 1:

ROTATE Q.4F1 AND Q.5F1

Q.4F1 Do you approve or disapprove of the job the Republican leaders in Congress are doing? [IF DK ENTER AS DK. IF DEPENDS PROBE ONCE WITH:
Overall do you approve or disapprove of the job the Republican leaders in Congress are doing? IF STILL DEPENDS ENTER AS DK] 3-05

1 Approve
2 Disapprove
9 Don't know/Refused (VOL.)

Q.5F1 Do you approve or disapprove of the job the Democratic leaders in Congress are doing? [IF DK ENTER AS DK. IF DEPENDS PROBE ONCE WITH:
Overall do you approve or disapprove of the job the Democratic leaders in Congress are doing? IF STILL DEPENDS ENTER AS DK] 3-05

1 Approve
2 Disapprove
ASK FORM 2:

Q.6F2 Do you approve or disapprove of the way your own representative to the U.S. House in Congress is handling his or her job? [IF DK ENTER AS DK. IF DEPENDS PROBE ONCE WITH: Overall do you approve or disapprove of the job your own representative in Congress is doing? IF STILL DEPENDS ENTER AS DK] {9-93}

1 Approve
2 Disapprove
9 Don’t know/Refused (VOL.)

ASK FORM 2:

Now thinking about George W. Bush…

Q.7F2 Do you approve or disapprove of the way George W. Bush is handling

[INSERT ITEM, RANDOMIZE]

a.F2 The economy {2-05}
b.F2 The situation in Iraq {2-05}
c.F2 Terrorist threats {2-05}
d.F2 The nation’s foreign policy {2-05}
e.F2 The environment {2-05}
f.F2 Energy policy {4-04}
g.F2 Social Security {2-05}

RESPONSE CATEGORIES:

1 Approve
2 Disapprove
9 Don’t know/Refused

ASK ALL:

Q.8 Now I will read a list of some stories covered by news organizations this past month. As I read each item, tell me if you happened to follow this news story very closely, fairly closely, not too closely, or not at all closely. [INSERT ITEM; RANDOMIZE. OBSERVE FORM SPLITS]

a. George W. Bush’s proposal to deal with the Social Security system {3-05.2-98
   Clinton modified}

b. The high price of gasoline these days {3-05}

c. Reports about the condition of the U.S. economy {1-05}

ASK FORM 1 ONLY:
d.F1 News about the current situation in Iraq \{3-05\}

ASK FORM 2 ONLY:

e.F2 The selection of the new Pope \{new\}

RESPONSE CATEGORIES:

1 Very closely
2 Fairly closely
3 Not too closely
4 Not at all closely
9 Don’t know/Refused (VOL.)

NO QUESTION 9

ASK ALL:

Q.10 This year, have Republicans and Democrats in Washington been working
together more to solve problems OR have they been bickering and opposing one
another more than usual? \{1-05 will work; 6-04\}

1 Working together more
2 Bickering and opposing one another more than usual
3 Same as in the past (VOL.)
[IF “2” IN Q.10, ASK]:

Q.11 Who do you think is more to blame for this… Republicans or Democrats? \{1-02

\textit{re: will work}\}

1 Republicans
2 Democrats
3 Both (VOL)
4 Neither (VOL)
9 Don’t Know/Refused

ASK ALL:

Q.12 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] is ABOUT THE SAME as it has been, that the country is MAKING PROGRESS in this area, or that the country is LOSING GROUND?

a. The way the health care system is working \{3-02\}
b. Political corruption \{3-02\}
c. International terrorism {3-02}
d. The availability of good-paying jobs {3-02}
e. The quality of public education {3-02}
f. Environmental pollution {11-97}
g. Illegal drugs {2-01 mod}
h. Illegal immigration {11-97}
i. The federal budget deficit {11-97}
j. The financial condition of Social Security {new; see comparison 12-96}
k. The financial condition of Medicare {new; see comparison 12-96}

RESPONSE CATEGORIES:

1 About the same
2 Making progress
3 Losing ground
9 Don’t know/Refused

Thinking again about news stories…

Q.13 How closely did you follow news about the debate over changing Senate rules to stop the Democrats from using the filibuster against some of President Bush’s judicial nominees--very closely, fairly closely, not too closely, or not at all closely? {new}
Q.14 How do you feel about this issue—do you favor or oppose changing the rules of the Senate to stop the use of filibusters against judicial nominees? *new*

1 Favor
2 Oppose
9 Don't know/Refused

Q.15 Who is more responsible for this situation … is it [ROTATE OPTIONS] President Bush for nominating judges who are too conservative, or is it the Democrats for using Senate rules to block a majority vote that they would lose? *new*

1 Bush
2 The Democrats
9 Don't know/Refused

Q.16 Have you seen, read or heard any advertisements that take sides on this issue?

{new}

1 Yes
2 No
9 Don't know/Refused

Q.17 Have you received any telephone calls from groups or organizations with a point of view about this issue? {new}

1 Yes
2 No
9 Don't know/Refused

Q.18 Here are a couple of statements about the situation in the Senate. For each, please tell me if you completely agree, mostly agree, mostly DISagree, or completely DISagree with it. [INSERT ITEM; RANDOMIZE]
a. The Republicans won the last election so President Bush should be able to appoint anyone he wants to the federal courts if a majority of Senators agree.

\{new\}

b. The minority party ought to be able to block some of the judges they feel strongly about because judges are appointed to the federal courts for life terms.

\{new\}

RESPONSE CATEGORIES:

1  Completely agree
2  Mostly agree
3  Mostly DISagree
4  Completely DISagree
9  Don't know/Refused

Thinking again about news stories…

Q.19 How closely did you follow news about ethics complaints made against the House majority leader Tom DeLay --very closely, fairly closely, not too closely, or not at all closely? \{new; see comparison with Gingrich 8-97, 1-97\}

1  Very closely
Q.20 From what you’ve heard or read, do you think that Tom DeLay is guilty of violating the ethical standards of the House, or don’t you think so? *{new; see comparison with Gingrich 8-97, 1-97}*  

1 Yes, guilty  
2 No, don’t think so  
9 Don't know/Refused

Q.21 How much, if anything, have you heard about a proposal that would allow younger workers to invest a portion of their Social Security taxes in private retirement accounts, which might include stocks or mutual funds — have you heard a lot, a little or nothing at all? *{3-05 NII, 3-05 Typology Callback}*  

1 A lot  
2 A little  
3 Nothing at all
Q.22 Generally, do you favor or oppose this proposal? \(3-05 \text{ NII, 3-05 Typology}
\)

\textit{Callback}

1 Favor

2 Oppose

9 Don't know/Refused

IF ‘FAVOR’ OR ‘OPPOSE’ (1,2 IN Q.22) ASK:

Q.23 Do you feel strongly about this, or do you think you could change your mind?

\(3-05 \text{ NII}\)

1 Feel strongly / won’t change mind

2 Could change mind / don’t feel strongly

9 Don’t know/Refused

ASK FORM 1:

Q.24F1 One proposal for dealing with Social Security’s financial situation is to keep the system as it is now for lower income retirees, but limit the growth of
future benefits for wealthy and middle income retirees. Would you favor or oppose this proposal? {new}

1  Favor
2  Oppose
9  Don’t know/Refused

ASK FORM 2:

Q.24F2 George W. Bush has proposed dealing with Social Security’s financial situation by keeping the system as it is now for lower income retirees, but limiting the growth of future benefits for wealthy and middle income retirees. Would you favor or oppose this proposal? {new}

1  Favor
2  Oppose
9  Don’t know/Refused

ASK ALL:

ROTATE Q.25/Q.26 BLOCK WITH Q.27/Q.28 BLOCK

On a different subject…
Q.25  How would you rate economic conditions in this country today… as excellent, good, only fair, or poor? {1-05}

1  Excellent
2  Good
3  Only fair
4  Poor
9  Don’t know/Refused

Q.26  A year from now, do you expect that economic conditions in the country as a whole will be better than they are at present, or worse, or just about the same as now? {1-05}

1  Better
2  Worse
3  Same
9  Don’t know/Refused [VOL.]

Thinking about your own personal finances...

Q.27  How would you rate your own personal financial situation? Would you say you are in excellent shape, good shape, only fair shape or poor shape? {1-05}
1 Excellent shape
2 Good shape
3 Only fair shape
4 Poor shape
9 Don’t know/Refused (VOL.)

Q.28 Over the course of the next year, do you think the financial situation of you and your family will improve a lot, improve some, get a little worse or get a lot worse? {1-05}

1 Improve a lot
2 Improve some
3 Get a little worse
4 Get a lot worse
5 Stay the same (VOL.)
9 Don’t know/Refused (VOL.)

Q.29 Next, I'd like to ask you some more about the nation’s economy. First do you think (INSERT ITEM; RANDOMIZE] is/are a very big problem, a big
problem, a small problem, or not a problem for the nation’s economy today?

\{new\}  [HOW ABOUT…]

a. The job situation  
b. Inflation  
c. Interest rates  
d. Gasoline prices  
e. The trade deficit  
f. The federal budget deficit

**RESPONSE CATEGORIES:**

1  Very big problem  
2  Big problem  
3  Small problem  
4  Not a problem  
9  Don’t know/Refused

Q.30  Do you think now is a very good, good, bad, or very bad time to invest in the stock market? \{new\}

1  Very good
Q.31 Thinking now about job opportunities where you live, would you say there are plenty of jobs available in your community or are jobs difficult to find? {1-05}

1 Plenty of jobs available
2 Jobs are difficult to find
3 Lots of some jobs, few of others (VOL.)
9 Don’t know/Refused

Q.32 What’s your impression about the real estate market in your community? Is housing very affordable, fairly affordable, not too affordable, or not at all affordable? {6-01}

1 Very affordable
2 Fairly affordable
3 Not too affordable
Thinking now about your own situation….

Q.33 Have there been times during the last year when you did not have enough money [INSERT ITEM] your family needed?

[RANDOMIZE ITEMS A-C FIRST]

a. To buy food {6-03}
b. To buy clothing {US Global 2002; 6-01}
c. To pay for medical and health care {6-03}

[ITEM D ALWAYS LAST]
d. To pay for gasoline or other transportation costs {6-01}

RESPONSE CATEGORIES:

1 Yes
2 No
9 Don’t know/Refused

EMPLOY Are you now employed full-time, part-time or not employed?
1 Full-time
2 Part-time
3 Not employed
9 Don't know/Refused

**IF “NOT EMPLOYED” (3 IN EMPLOY) ASK:**

EMPLOY2 Is that because you are a student, because you are retired, because you choose not to work, or because you’ve lost or quit a job?

1 Student
2 Retired
3 Choose not to work
4 Lost or quit a job
5 Other reason [VOL.]
9 Don’t know/Refused

**IF EMPLOYED (1 OR 2 IN EMPLOY) ASK:**

EMPLOY3 Are you self-employed, do you work for someone else, or do you do both? \{12-98 mod for known employed\}

1 Self-employed/own a business
2 Work for someone else
3 Both
9 Don’t know/Refused

IF WORK FOR SOMEONE ELSE OR BOTH (2 or 3 in EMPLOY3) ASK:

EMPLOY4  Do you work for an annual salary or are you paid by the hour?  \{new\}

1 Salary
2 Hourly
3 Both (VOL.)
4 Other / piecework / by the job (VOL.)
9 Don’t know/Refused

ASK ALL:

EMPLOY5  Do you or does anyone else in your household work at more than one job?  \{6-02; 6-01\}

1 Yes
2 No
9 Don’t know/Refused
EMPLOY 6  Over the past 12 months, has there been a time when you or someone in
your household has been without a job and looking for work, or not?
{12-04 asked in a series; asked about spouse 4-02; 2004 US Global on
self not household}

1  Yes
2  No
9  Don't know/Refused

IF EMPLOYED PART-TIME (EMPLOY EQ 2):

EMPLOY 7  Would you prefer to be working full time, or not? {2-04}

1  Yes
2  No
9  Don’t know/Refused

[ASK IF 1 OR 2 “EMPLOYED FULL OR PART TIME” IN EMPLOY]:

Q.34  Do you now earn enough money to lead the kind of life you want, or
not? {5-04}

1  Yes
2  No
9 Don't know/Refused

[ASK IF 2 ‘NO’ IN Q.34]:

Q.35 Do you think you will be able to earn enough money in the future to lead the kind of life you want, or not? {5-04}

1 Yes
2 No
9 Don't know/Refused

ASK ALL:

Q.36 I’d like you to think about some concerns that people may have. How concerned are you, if at all, about [INSERT ITEM: RANDOMIZE]? Are you very concerned, somewhat concerned, not too concerned, or not at all concerned about this? What about [NEXT ITEM]...?

a. Not having enough money for your retirement? {1-04}

b. Being unable to save enough money to put a child through college? {1-04}

c. Being unable to afford necessary health care when a family member gets sick? {1-04}

d. Losing your job or taking a cut in pay {1-04}
e. Going too deeply into debt {1-04}

**RESPONSE CATEGORIES:**

1. Very concerned
2. Somewhat concerned
3. Not too concerned
4. Not at all concerned
5. Does not apply [VOL.]
9. Don’t know/Refused

Q.37 Thinking about the money you owe on credit cards and installment loans excluding your mortgage, would you say you... (READ) {2-04 US Global}

1. Owe a lot more than you can afford
2. Owe a little more than you can afford
3. Owe about what you can afford
4. OR owe less than you can afford
5. Do not have any debts [VOL. DO NOT READ]
6. No credit cards or loans [VOL. DO NOT READ]
9. Don’t know/Refused
Q.39  Do you have a retirement plan besides Social Security?  [IF YES: Is any of your retirement money in the stock market through stocks, mutual funds or a 401k plan?]  \{early 10-02\}

1  Yes, retirement plan in the stock market
2  Yes, but not in stock market
3  No, no retirement plan
9  Don’t know/Refused

Q.40  [IF 1,2 IN Q.39 READ: Aside from retirement accounts...] Do you currently own shares in a mutual fund that includes stock?  \{early 10-02\}

1  Yes
2  No
9  Don't know/Refused (VOL.)

Q.41  Do you currently own stock in any INDIVIDUAL COMPANIES besides a company that you or someone else in your household works for?  \{early 10-02\}

1  Yes
2  No
Q.42 Within the past year, have you made changes to your investments -- that is -- decided to buy or sell any stocks or shares in a mutual fund? [IF YES ASK: Have you made any changes within the past six months?] {early 10-02}

1 Yes, within past six months
2 Yes, within past year
3 No changes in the past year
9 Don’t know/Refused (VOL.)

Now, just a few questions for statistical purposes only.

SEX [ENTER RESPONDENT'S SEX:]

1 Male
2 Female

AGE What is your age?

________ years
97 97 or older

99 Don’t know/Refused [VOL.]

EDUC What is the last grade or class that you completed in school? [DO NOT READ]

1 None, or grade 1-8
2 High school incomplete (Grades 9-11)
3 High school graduate (Grade 12 or GED certificate)
4 Technical, trade, or vocational school AFTER high school
5 Some college, no 4-year degree (including associate degree)
6 College graduate (B.S., B.A., or other 4-year degree)
7 Post-graduate training or professional schooling after college
   (e.g., toward a master's Degree or Ph.D.; law or medical school)
9 Don't know/Refused (VOL.)

HISP Are you, yourself, of Hispanic origin or descent, such as Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, or some other Spanish background?

1 Yes — SEE INSTRUCTION
2 No — GO TO RACE
9  Don't know/Refused (VOL.) — GO TO RACE

[INTERVIEWER: IF RESPONDENT ANSWERED 1 ‘HISPANIC’ IN HISP, ASK: Are you white Hispanic, black Hispanic, or some other race? IF NON-

HISPANIC ASK:]

RACE    What is your race? Are you white, black, Asian, or some other?

1    White
2    Black
3    Asian
4    Other or mixed race
9    Don't know/Refused (VOL.)

MARITAL  Are you married, divorced, separated, widowed, or never been married?

1    Married
2    Divorced
3    Separated
4    Widowed
5    Never been married
9    Don't know/Refused (VOL.)
PARENT  Are you the parent or guardian of any children under 18 now living in your household?

1 Yes
2 No
9 Don’t know/Refused (VOL.)

COLLEGE  Do you have any children currently enrolled in college? {new} 

1 Yes
2 No
9 Don’t know/Refused (VOL.)

RELIG  What is your religious preference — Protestant, Roman Catholic, Jewish, Muslim, Mormon, or an orthodox church such as the Greek or Russian Orthodox Church?

1 Protestant (include Baptist, Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, Episcopalian, Pentecostal, Jehovah's Witness, Church of Christ, etc.)
2 Roman Catholic
3 Jewish
4 Mormon (include Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints)
5 Orthodox Church (Greek or Russian)
6 Islam/Muslim
7 Other religion (SPECIFY)
8 No religion, not a believer, atheist, agnostic
9 Don't know/Refused (VOL.)

IF RELIG = 1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 9 ASK:

BORN Would you describe yourself as a "born again" or evangelical Christian, or not?

1 Yes, would
2 No, would not
9 Don't know/Refused (VOL.)

ASK ALL:

ATTEND Aside from weddings and funerals, how often do you attend religious services... more than once a week, once a week, once or twice a month, a few times a year, seldom, or never?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>More than once a week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Once a week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Once or twice a month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>A few times a year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Seldom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Never</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Don't know/Refused (VOL.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**INCOME**  
Last year, that is in 2004, what was your total family income from all sources, before taxes? Just stop me when I get to the right category.

**[READ]**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Income Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Less than $10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>10 to under $20,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>20 to under $30,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>30 to under $40,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>40 to under $50,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>50 to under $75,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>75 to under $100,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>100 to under $150,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>$150,000 or more</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
REGIST These days, many people are so busy they can't find time to register to vote, or move around so often they don't get a chance to re-register. Are you NOW registered to vote in your precinct or election district or haven't you been able to register so far?

1  Yes, registered
2  No, not registered
9  Don't know/Refused (VOL.)

IF RESPONDENT ANSWERED '1' YES IN REGIST ASK:

REGICERT Are you absolutely certain that you are registered to vote, or is there a chance that your registration has lapsed because you moved or for some other reason?

1  Absolutely certain
2  Chance registration has lapsed
9  Don’t know/Refused (VOL.)
ASK ALL:

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

1 Republican
2 Democrat
3 Independent
4 No preference (VOL.)
5 Other party (VOL.)
9 Don't know/Refused

IF ANSWERED 3, 4, 5 OR 9 IN PARTY, ASK:

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

1 Republican
2 Democrat
9 Other/Don't know/Refused (VOL.)

ASK ALL:

IDEO In general, would you describe your political views as... [READ]
1 Very conservative
2 Conservative
3 Moderate
4 Liberal, OR
5 Very liberal?
9 [DO NOT READ] Don't know/Refused (VOL.)

PVOTE04A In last year’s presidential election between George W. Bush and John Kerry, did things come up that kept you from voting, or did you happen to vote?

1 Voted
2 Did not vote (includes too young to vote)
8 Don't remember if voted (VOL.)
9 Refused (VOL.)

IF YES (1 IN PVOTE04A) ASK:

PVOTE04B Did you vote for Bush, Kerry or someone else?

1 Bush
2 Kerry
3 Other candidate
4 Don't remember which candidate (VOL.)
9 Refused (VOL.)

ASK ALL:

INCLUDE "Your spouse" FOR MARRIED PEOPLE ONLY (MARITAL=1)

LABOR Are you (or is your spouse) a member of a labor union?

1 Yes, respondent is
2 Yes, spouse is
3 Yes, both
4 No, Neither are
9 Don't know/Refused (VOL.)

OWNRENT Do you own or rent your home?

1 Own
2 Rent
3 [DO NOT READ] Other arrangement (VOL.)
9 [DO NOT READ] Don't know/Refused (VOL.)
HEALTH  Do you currently have health insurance or not? {12-93}

1  Yes, have health insurance
2  No
9  Don’t know/Refused (VOL.)

BANK  Have you ever had to declare bankruptcy, or hasn’t this happened to you? {new}

1  Yes
2  No
9  Don’t know/Refused (VOL.)

ZIPCODE  What is your zipcode?

_____ Enter Zipcode

9  Don’t know/Refused

END OF INTERVIEW.
CONTACT  At a later date, news reporters may want to talk further with people who took part in this survey. Would you be willing to talk to a reporter about the survey topics at a convenient time?

1  Yes
2  No -- GO TO WEBSITE
9  Don't know/Refused -- GO TO WEBSITE

IF YES (1 IN CONTACT) ASK:

NAME  So that a reporter might reach you more easily, can you tell me your first name?

1  Gave name (SPECIFY)
2  Declined to be contacted at this point

ASK ALL:

WEBSITE  Thank you very much for your time. In case you are interested, this survey is being conducted by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press. They will have a report about it on their website in the coming weeks. Would you like their web site address?

[IF YES:] It is  www.peoplepress.org
1 Yes, website requested
2 No, website not requested

THANK RESPONDENT: Thank you again for your time. Have a nice day/evening.

I HEREBY ATTEST THAT THIS IS A TRUE AND HONEST INTERVIEW.
REFERENCES


