

HOW DEEP IS OUR DISCONTENT?

"Angry." "Frustrated." "Demanding change." These words have been used repeatedly this year to describe Americans' mood. In the next seven pages, we try to put current responses into a more meaningful context by comparing them to responses at six other points over the last 20 years.

WATERGATE 1974

Volatile measures

Things in the country these days are going badly (YSW, Mar.) 71%

Things in this country have pretty seriously gotten off on the wrong track (Roper, Sep.-Oct.) 75%

The country is really in deep and serious trouble today (YSW, Sep.) 65%

Presidential disapproval rating (Gallup, Aug.) 66%

Conference Board Consumer Confidence Index, Dec. (1985=100) 43.2

Economy is getting worse, same, better NA

Stable measures

No or a little satisfaction with family life (some/a fair amount/quite a bit 20%, a great deal/a very great deal 76%) (NORC, Feb.-Apr.) 3%

Dissatisfied with the work you do* (NORC, Feb.-Apr.) 15%

Not satisfied at all with your present financial situation (more or less 46%, pretty well 31%) (NORC, Feb.-Apr.) 23%

Things in personal life are going badly (YSW, Mar.) 11%

Have no real confidence that our country will be strong and prosperous a few years from now (some 44%, a lot 33%) (YSW, Sep.) 18%

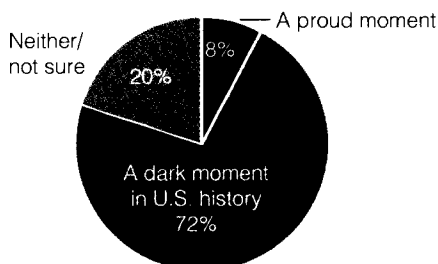
Generally pessimistic about our country's future (uncertain 41%, generally optimistic 41%) (Roper, May) 15%

Most public officials are not really interested in the problems of the average man (NORC, Feb.-Apr.) 64%

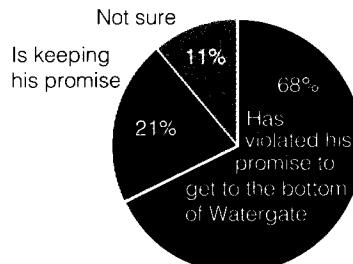
Note: YSW=Yankelovich, Skelly, and White for *Time*; Roper=Roper Organization; NORC=National Opinion Research Center. *Asked of those currently working, temporarily not at work, or keeping house (85%).

Question: **Here's a list of international events that the United States has been involved in in recent history. For each, please tell me whether you think it was a proud moment in American history, a dark moment, or neither....**

U.S. role in Vietnam was...

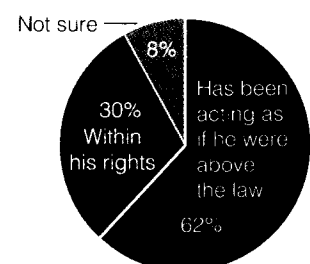


Question: **Do you feel Mr. Nixon has violated his promise to the American people to get to the bottom of the Watergate affair, or do you feel that he is keeping his promises?**



Question: **Talking about Watergate for a minute, do you feel that Mr. Nixon has been acting as if he were above the law or do you feel he has been acting within his rights?**

Mr. Nixon...



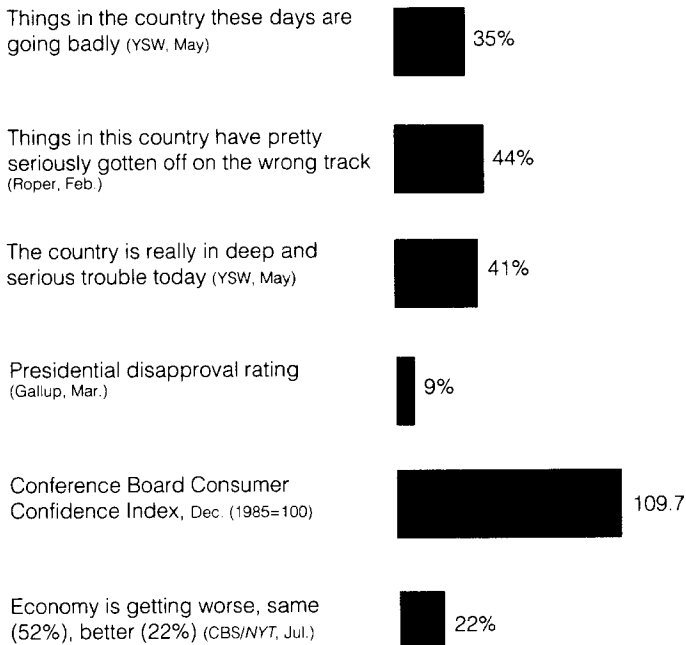
Source: Survey by Louis Harris and Associates for the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, December 6-14, 1974.

Source: Survey by Yankelovich, Skelly, and White for *Time*, March 1974.

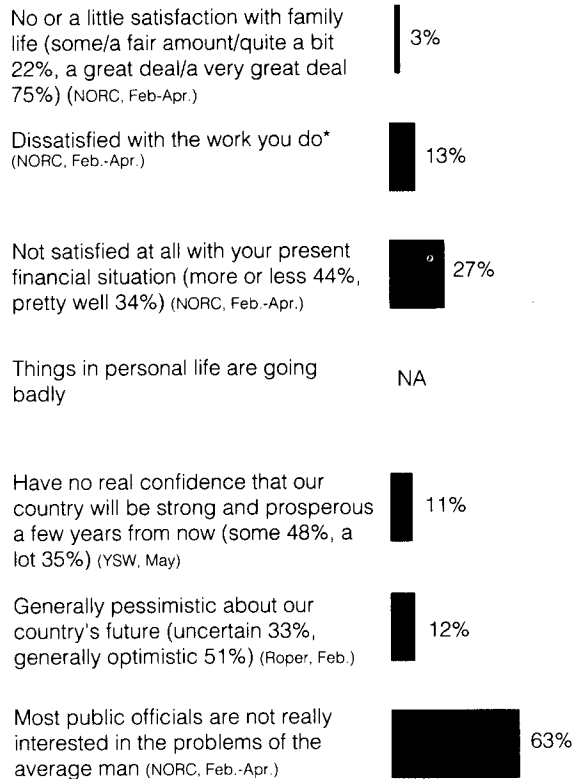
Early Carter Optimism 1977

The public's mood at any point has three distinct components: direction—whether we're satisfied or dissatisfied with conditions; intensity—how strongly is that view held and how uniform is the mood across different aspects of life; and target—whom do we hold responsible?

Volatile measures

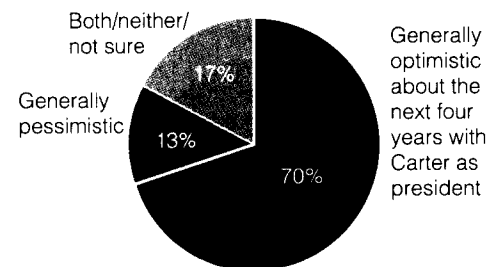


Stable measures

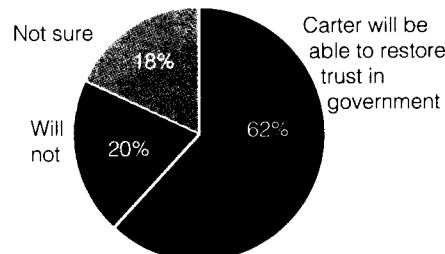


Note: CBS/NYT=CBS News/New York Times. *Asked of those currently working, temporarily not at work, or keeping house (86%).

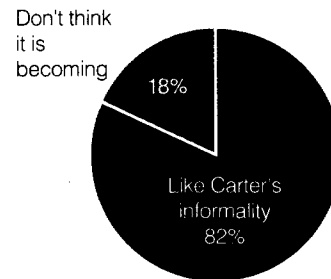
Question: **Are you generally optimistic or pessimistic about the next four years with Jimmy Carter as president?**



Question: **Here are some of the things Jimmy Carter says he wants to do as president. Please tell me whether you think he will, or will not, be able to do them? Do you think...?**



Question: **There's a lot of talk about Carter's style these days. Do you personally like his informality or don't you think it's really becoming for a president of the United States to act that way?**



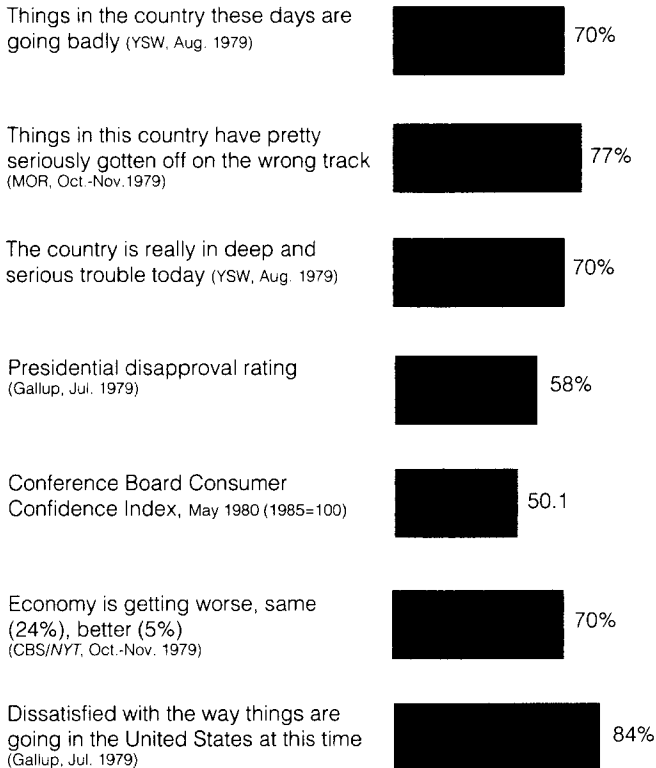
Source: Survey by CBS News/New York Times, January 7-13, 1977.

Note: Sample=registered voters. Source: Survey by Yankelovich, Skelly, and White for Time, March 1974.

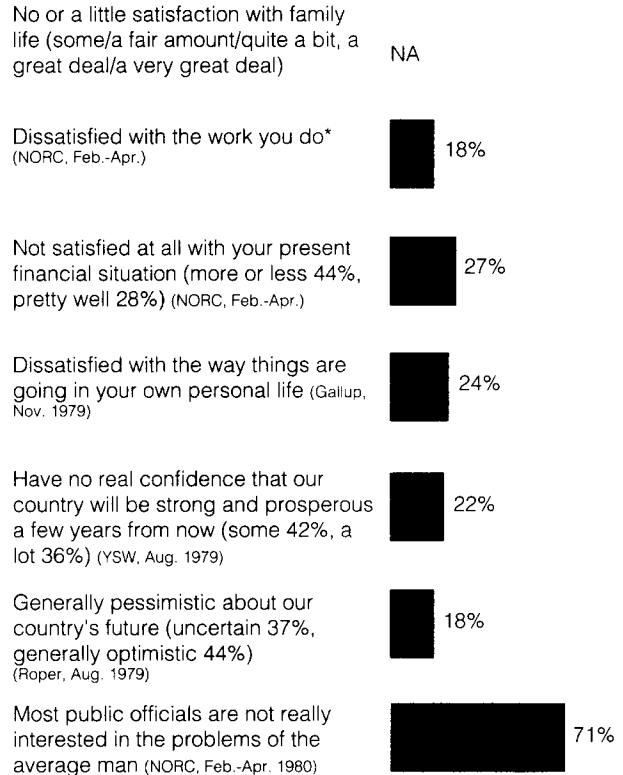
Carter Malaise 1979-80

We repeat measures in the upper-left of each page that assess conditions remote from people's immediate experience—like, "Is the country headed in the right direction, or is it off on the wrong track?" These judgments bounce wildly over the time span examined here. How deeply held can judgments be when they shift this sharply?

Volatile measures

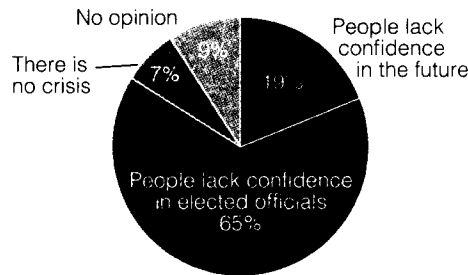


Stable measures



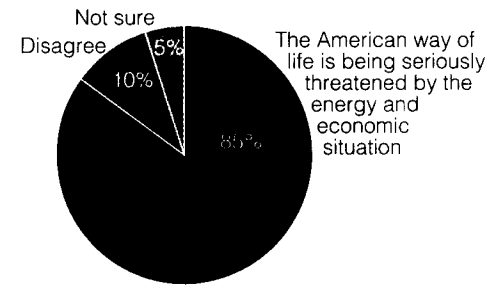
Note: MOR=Market Opinion Research for the Republican National Committee.

Question: Some people say there is a crisis of confidence in the country, that is, the people lack confidence in themselves and their future. Others say there is a crisis, but that it is a crisis of confidence in the elected officials. And others say there is no crisis at all. How about you...?



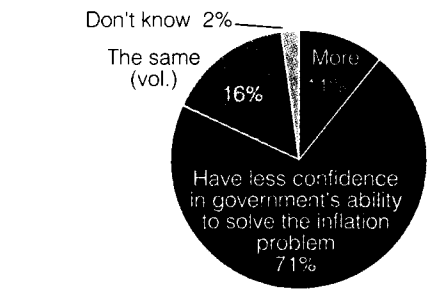
Source: Survey by CBS News/*New York Times*, October 29-November 3, 1979.

Question: Now I'd like you to tell me whether you agree or disagree with each of these statements. The American way of life is being seriously threatened by the energy and economic situation.



Source: Survey by ABC News/Louis Harris and Associates, September 18-28, 1979.

Question: Do you have more confidence or less confidence than you had a year ago in the government's ability to solve the inflation problem?

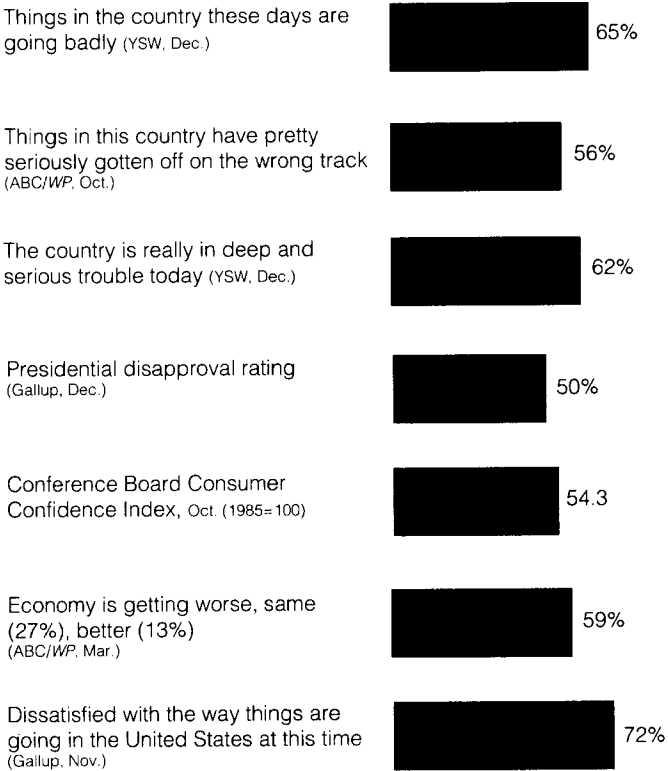


Source: Survey by Cambridge Reports for the American Retail Federation, April 17-May 5, 1980.

Reagan Recession 1982

The upper-right of each page shows facets of the mood that don't change much with events. Measures of things close to us are more stable and upbeat than those of things more remote. "Pop cynicism" measures—for example, "most politicians aren't interested in my problems"—have appeared pessimistic, even when the mood is upbeat.

Volatile measures

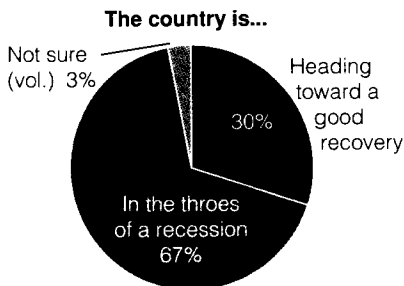


Stable measures

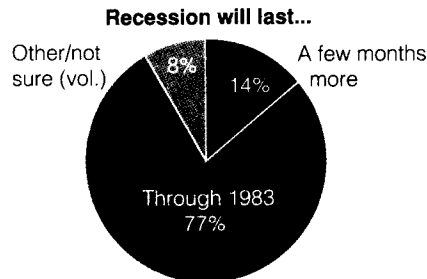


Note: ABC/WP=ABC News/Washington Post. *Asked of those currently working, temporarily not at work, or keeping house (84%).

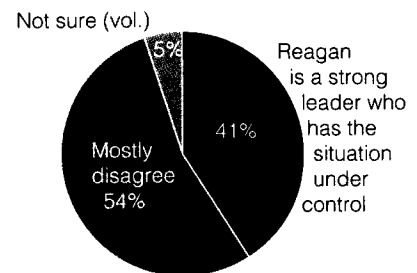
Question: President Reagan has stated that despite slow progress, the country is now heading toward a good recovery. Do you agree that we are now heading toward a good economic recovery—or do you feel that we are still in the throes of a recession?



Question: How long do you think the recession will last, a few months more or through 1983?



Question: Here are some statements about President Reagan. Will you tell me for each one whether you mostly agree or disagree. He is a strong leader who has the situation under control.



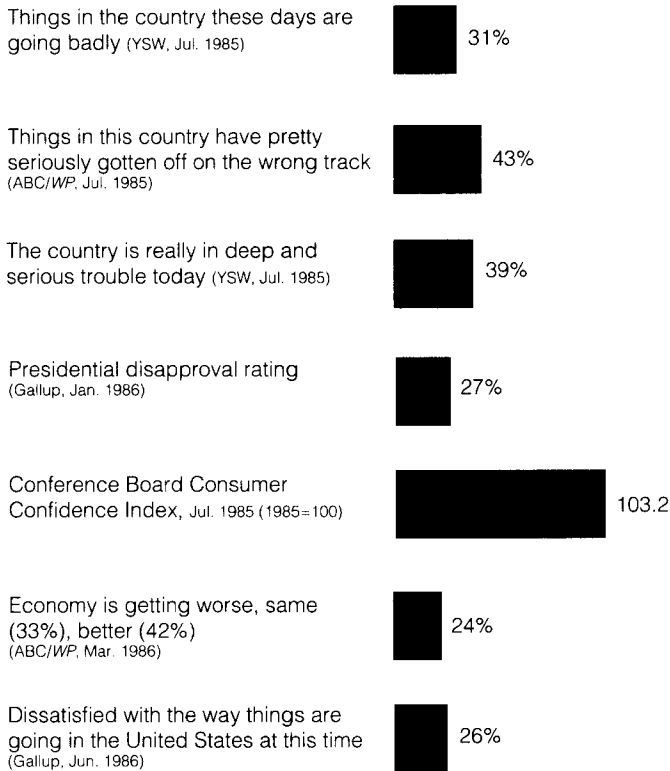
Note: Sample=registered voters.
Source: Survey by Yankelovich, Skelly, White for Time, October 5-7, 1982.

Note: Sample=registered voters.
Sample: Survey by Yankelovich, Skelly, and White for Time, December 8-9, 1982.

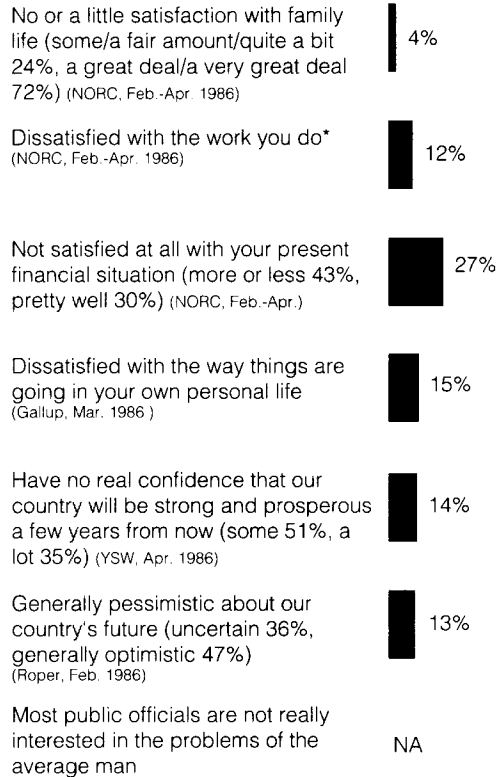
Morning in America 1985-86

The measures at the bottom of each page locate the source of the change in mood about national direction that has occurred in each period we examine: Watergate; President Carter taking over with fresh hope; dissatisfaction with his leadership; the 1982 recession; "Morning in America" in 1985, the Gulf War, and today.

Volatile measures

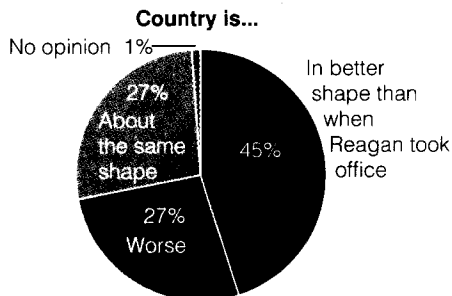


Stable measures



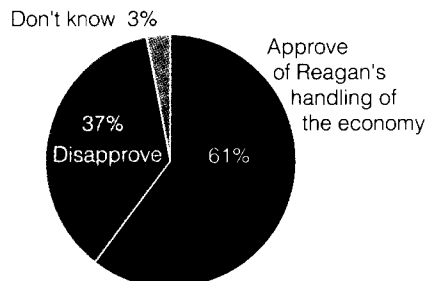
Note: YCS=Yankelovich Clancy Shulman for Time. *Asked of those currently working, temporarily not at work, or keeping house (83%).

Question: **Overall, would you say this country is in better shape, worse shape, or about the same shape as when President Reagan took office in January 1981?**



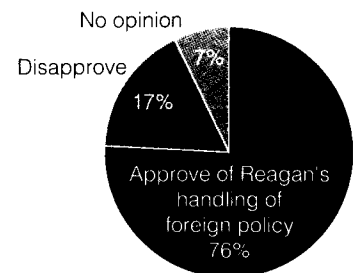
Source: Survey by ABC News, January 24-26, 1986.

Question: **Do you approve or disapprove of the way Ronald Reagan is handling the nation's economy?**



Source: Survey by ABC News/Washington Post, May 15-19, 1986.

Question: **Do you approve or disapprove of the way Ronald Reagan is handling foreign policy?**



Source: Survey by CBS News/New York Times, April 15, 1986.

Gulf War 1991

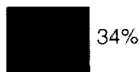
The uptick in national mood in the spring of 1991 was in many ways unnatural. The economy had reached its recessionary low, which should have soured the national mood, but the successful conclusion of the Gulf War raised our sentiments. They were bound to plunge as the events which elevated our mood faded and the recession took its toll.

Volatile measures

Things in the country these days are going badly (YCS, Mar.)



Things in this country have pretty seriously gotten off on the wrong track (LAT, Jun.)



The country is really in deep and serious trouble today



Presidential disapproval rating (Gallup, Feb.-Mar.)



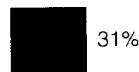
Conference Board Consumer Confidence Index, Mar. (1985=100)



Economy is getting worse, same (36%), better (10%) (ABC/WP, Mar.)



Dissatisfied with the way things are going in the United States at this time (Gallup, Mar.)



Stable measures

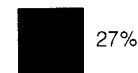
No or a little satisfaction with family life (some/a fair amount/quite a bit 22%, a great deal/a very great deal 74%) (NORC, Feb.-Apr.)



Dissatisfied with the work you do* (NORC, Feb.-Apr.)



Not satisfied at all with your present financial situation (more or less 46%, pretty well 28%) (NORC, Feb.-Apr.)



Dissatisfied with the way things are going in your own personal life (Gallup, Feb.)



Have no real confidence that our country will be strong and prosperous a few years from now (some, a lot)



Generally pessimistic about our country's future (uncertain, generally optimistic)

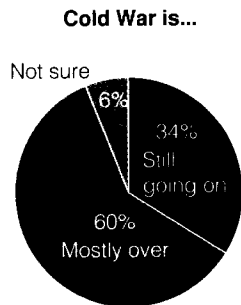


Most public officials are not really interested in the problems of the average man (NORC, Feb.-Apr.)

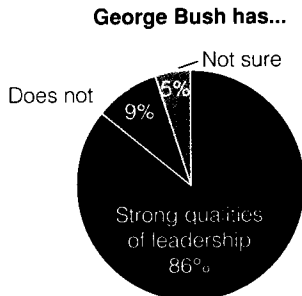


Note: LAT=Los Angeles Times. *Asked of those currently working, temporarily not at work, or keeping house (80%).

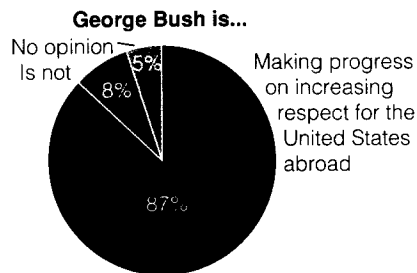
Question: **Do you think the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union is still going on, or is it mostly over?**



Question: **Do you think George Bush has strong qualities of leadership, or not?**



Question: **Here is a list of some problems and some responsibilities facing the president and his administration. Do you think George Bush is making progress or not making progress on handling each of these different problems? Increasing respect for the United States abroad.**



Note: Sample=registered voters.
Source: Survey by NBC News/Wall Street Journal, August 28, 1991.

Source: Survey by the Los Angeles Times, March 9-11, 1991.

Source: Survey by the Gallup Organization, March 7-10, 1991.

1992

How dissatisfied are we today, and whom do we blame? The polls show clearly the direction of today's national mood (very negative), but they tell us little about its intensity or its target(s). The president is down, but Congress is even more so. The two parties seem to be blamed about equally (not shown).

Volatile measures

Things in the country these days are going badly (YCS, Jan.) 72%

Things in this country have pretty seriously gotten off on the wrong track (ABC, Apr.) 81%

The country is really in deep and serious trouble today NA

Presidential disapproval rating (Gallup, Apr.) 54%

Conference Board Consumer Confidence Index, Feb. (1985=100) 47.3

Economy is getting worse, same (34%), better (9%) (ABC/Money, Jan.-Feb.) 57%

Dissatisfied with the way things are going in the United States at this time (Gallup, Jun.) 84%

Stable measures

No or a little satisfaction with family life (some/a fair amount/quite a bit, a great deal/a very great deal) NA

Dissatisfied with the work you do (Gallup, Dec. 1991) 16%

Dissatisfied with your family or household income (Gallup, Dec. 1991) 33%

Dissatisfied with the way things are going in your own personal life (Gallup, Jan.) 22%

Have no real confidence that our country will be strong and prosperous a few years from now (some, a lot) NA

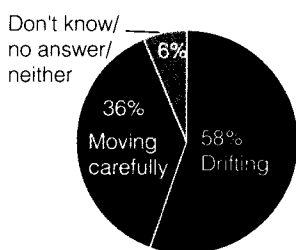
Generally pessimistic about our country's future (uncertain, generally optimistic) NA

Most public officials are not really interested in the problems of the average man (ABC, Apr.) 65%

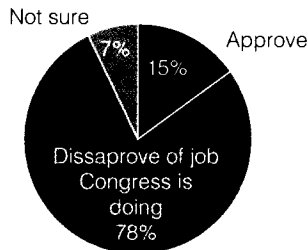
Note: ABC/Money=ABC News/Money magazine.

Question: **Some people say the Bush administration is drifting without clear policies, while other people say it is moving carefully to develop its plans. Which do you think is more accurate?**

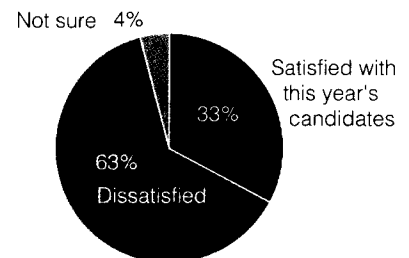
Bush administration is...



Question: **In general, do you approve or disapprove of the job Congress is doing?**



Question: **How satisfied are you with the candidates in this year's presidential election—very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, somewhat dissatisfied, or very dissatisfied?**



Note: Sample=registered voters.
Source: Survey by CBS News/New York Times, April 20-23, 1992.

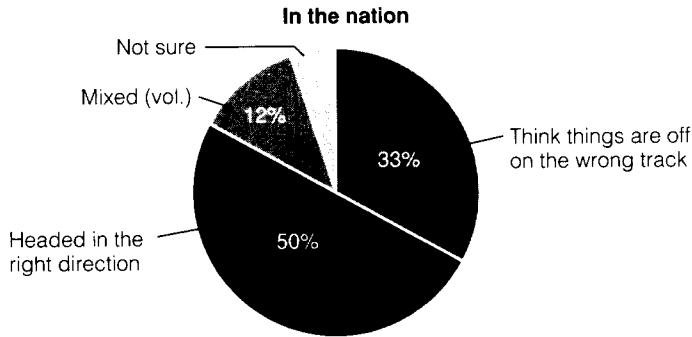
Note: Sample=registered voters.
Source: Survey by NBC News/Wall Street Journal, April 11-14, 1992.

Source: Survey by Louis Harris and Associates, April 22-27, 1992.

MY TOWN, THE NATION

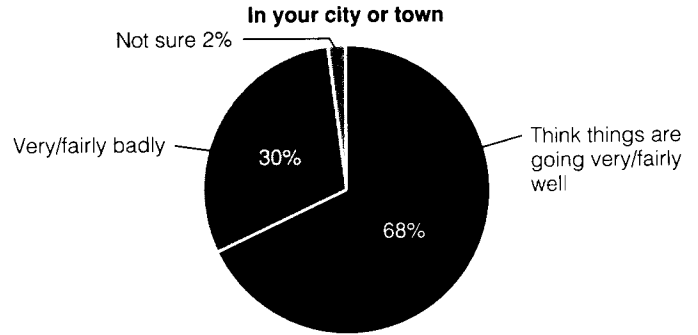
As noted in the preceding pages, polls consistently reveal a gap between the way Americans see their personal lives and the way we view things in the country. "Local" attitudes tend to be much more positive. Ninety-one percent of us say we are satisfied with our family life, compared to 43% who say family life in the nation is excellent or good.

Question: **All in all, do you think things in the nation are generally headed in the right direction, or do you feel that things are off on the wrong track?**



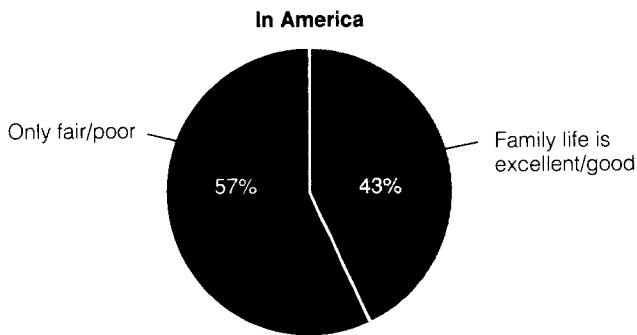
Source: Survey by NBC News/Wall Street Journal, July 26-29, 1991.

Question: **In general, how do you think things are going these days in the city or town where you live—very well, fairly well, fairly badly, or very badly?**



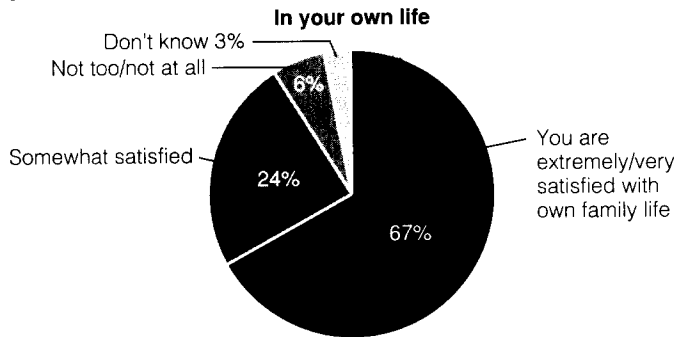
Source: Survey by Peter D. Hart Research Associates for NBC News and Newsweek, July 14-18, 1991.

Question: **In general, how would you rate the quality of American family life today? Would you say family life in the United States is excellent, good, only fair, or poor?**

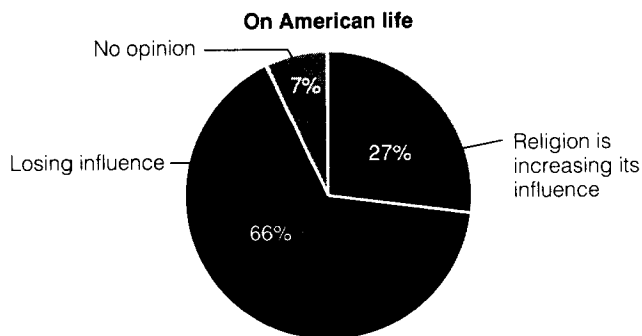


Source: Survey by Mellman & Lazarus, Inc., for Massachusetts Mutual Life Insurance Co., September 25, 1991.

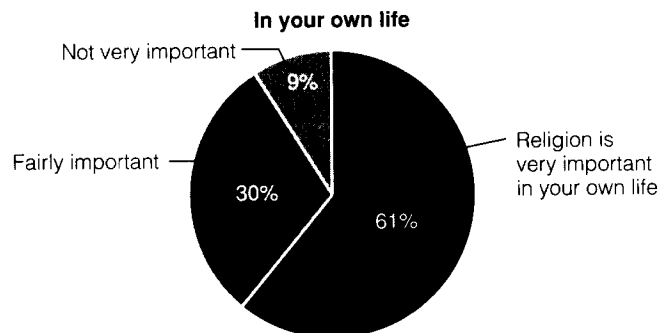
Question: **Thinking about your own family life, would you say you are extremely satisfied, very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, not too satisfied, or not at all satisfied with your family life? If you aren't sure, please say so.**



Question: **At the present time, do you think religion as a whole is increasing its influence on American life or losing its influence?**



Question: **How important would you say religion is in your own life—would you say it is very important, fairly important, or not very important?**



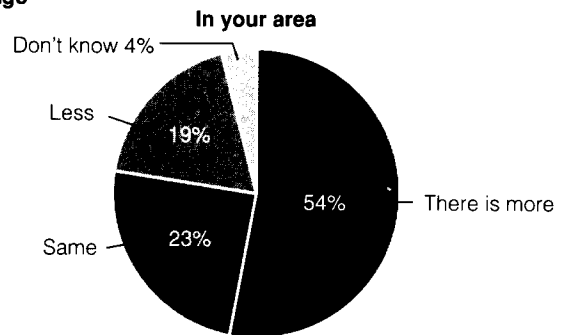
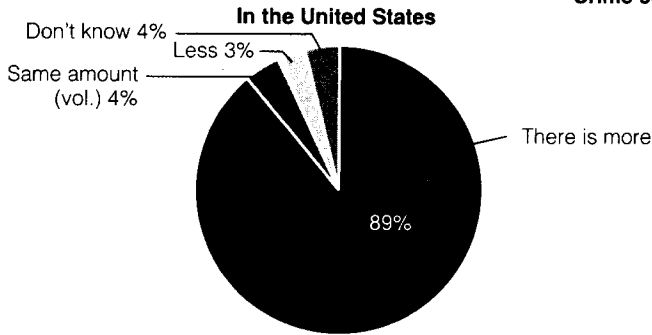
Source: Surveys by the Gallup Organization, November 21-24, 1991 (left chart), and April 9-12, 1992 (right chart).

Polls taken after the Los Angeles riots show that Americans feel that race relations in their own communities are generally good (75%), but that relations in the country are generally bad (68%).

Question: **Is there more crime in the United States than there was a year ago, or less?**

Question: **Is there more crime in your area than there was a year ago, or less?**

Crime compared to a year ago

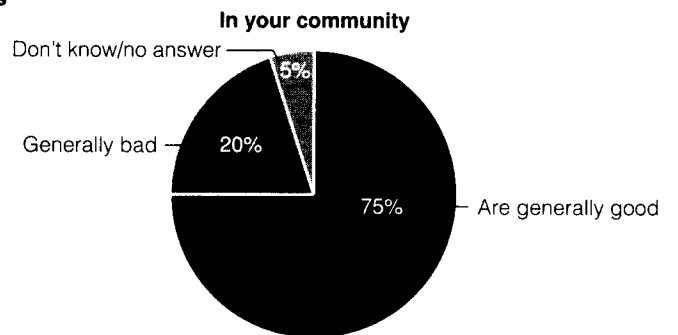
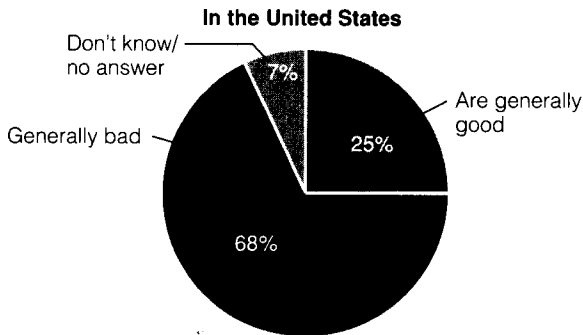


Source: Survey by the Gallup Organization, February 28-March 1, 1992.

Question: **Do you think race relations in the United States are generally good or generally bad?**

Question: **Do you think race relations in your community are generally good or generally bad?**

Race relations



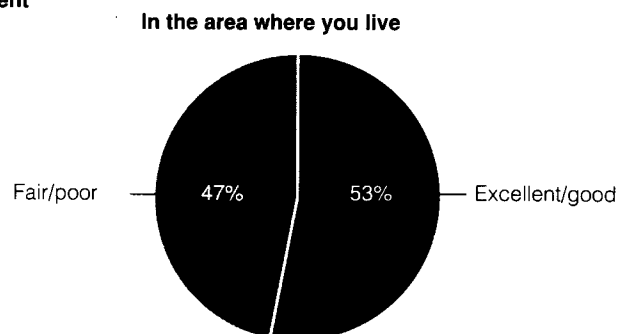
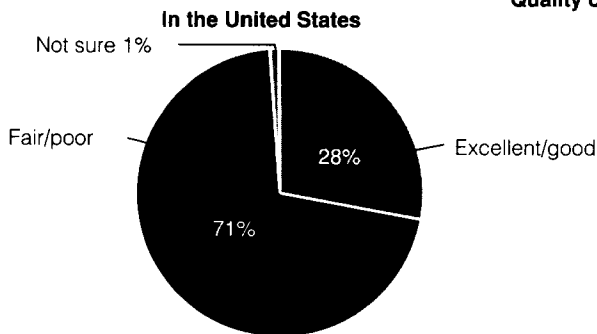
Note: Twenty-five percent of whites and 20% of blacks said that race relations in the United States are generally good. In contrast, 79% of whites and 58% of blacks said that race relations are generally good in their communities.

Source: Survey by CBS News/New York Times, May 6-8, 1992.

Question: **How would you rate the quality of the environment in the United States today—as excellent, good, fair, or poor?**

Question: **How would you rate the quality of the environment in the area where you live—as excellent, good, fair, or poor?**

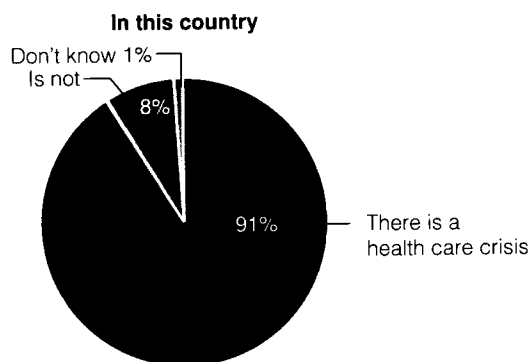
Quality of the environment



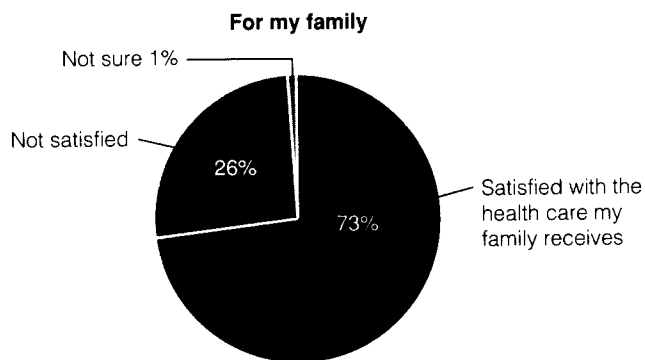
Source: Survey by Yankelevich Clancy Shulman for Time and CNN, November 27-28, 1990.

Is the "local" optimism denial? Or is it a more accurate reflection of the way things are than the national polling statistics? Is the national picture accurate, or is it largely a response to the negative impressions we get from the tube? We don't have to rely on television, of course, when it comes to evaluating things close to home.

Question: **In your opinion, is there a crisis in health care in this country today?**



Question: **In general, how satisfied are you with the health care your family receives...?**



Source: Survey by the Gallup Organization, June 27-30, 1991.

Source: Survey by NBC News/Wall Street Journal, December 6-9, 1991.

Question: **How about the public schools in the nation as a whole? What grade would you give the public schools nationally?**

Public schools nationally

A + B grades combined



Question: **Students are often given the grades, A, B, C, D and Fail to denote the quality of their work. Suppose the school your oldest child attends in this community were graded in the same way. What grade would you give the public schools here...?**

School oldest child attends in this community

A + B grades combined

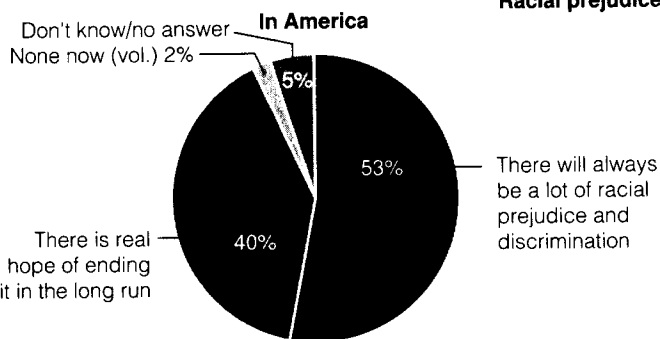


Note: Asked of parents of students attending public schools.

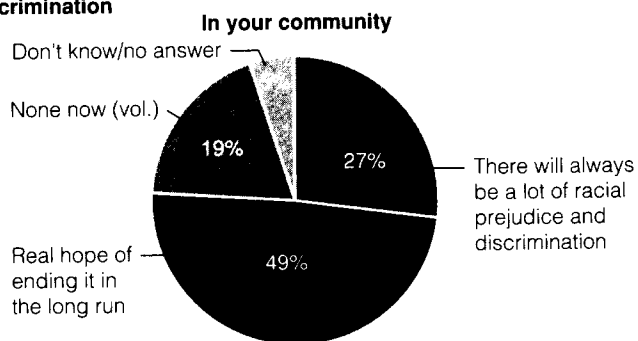
Source: Survey by the Gallup Organization for Phi Delta Kappan, May 3-17, 1991.

Question: **Do you think there will always be a lot of racial prejudice and discrimination in America, or is there real hope of ending it in the long run?**

Racial prejudice and discrimination



Question: **And in your community, do you think there will always be a lot of racial prejudice and discrimination in your community, or is there real hope of ending it in the long run?**



Note: Fifty-three percent of whites and 55% of blacks said that there will always be a lot of racial prejudice and discrimination in America; 26% and 32%, respectively, said that these problems will persist in their own communities.

Source: Survey by CBS News/New York Times, May 6-8, 1992.