

Public Opinion Polls and the 2010 Midterm Elections

Roger C. Lowery, Ph.D.
Professor and Department Chair
Department of Public & International Affairs
University of North Carolina Wilmington

lowery@uncw.edu

www.uncw.edu/people/lowery



The Midterm Congressional Election “Curse”

Only three exceptions since 1862



1934
House:
Democrats Gain
9 Seats
Senate:
Democrats Gain
9 Seats



1998
House:
Democrats Gain
5 Seats
Senate:
Democrats Gain
0 Seats

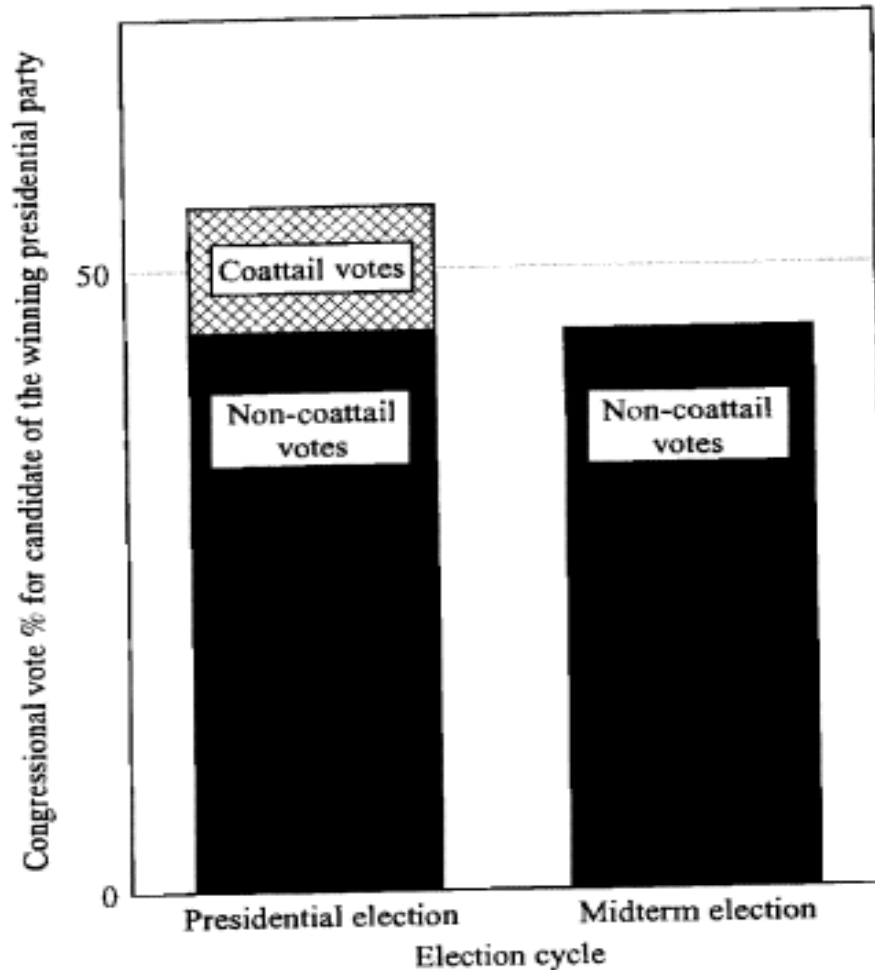


2002
House:
Republicans Gain
4 Seats
Senate:
Republicans Gain
2 Seats

Midterm Year	President	Midterm change in House seats of the President's party
2010	Obama	-60
1946	Truman	-55
1994	Clinton	-52
1958	Eisenhower	-48
1974	Ford	-48
1966	Johnson	-47
2006	G. W. Bush	-31
1950	Truman	-29
1982	Reagan	-26
1954	Eisenhower	-18
1978	Carter	-15
1970	Nixon	-12
1990	G. H. W. Bush	-8
1986	Reagan	-5
1962	Kennedy	-4
2002	G. W. Bush	+4
1998	Clinton	+5
	Average change	-26

The presidential-coattail explanation

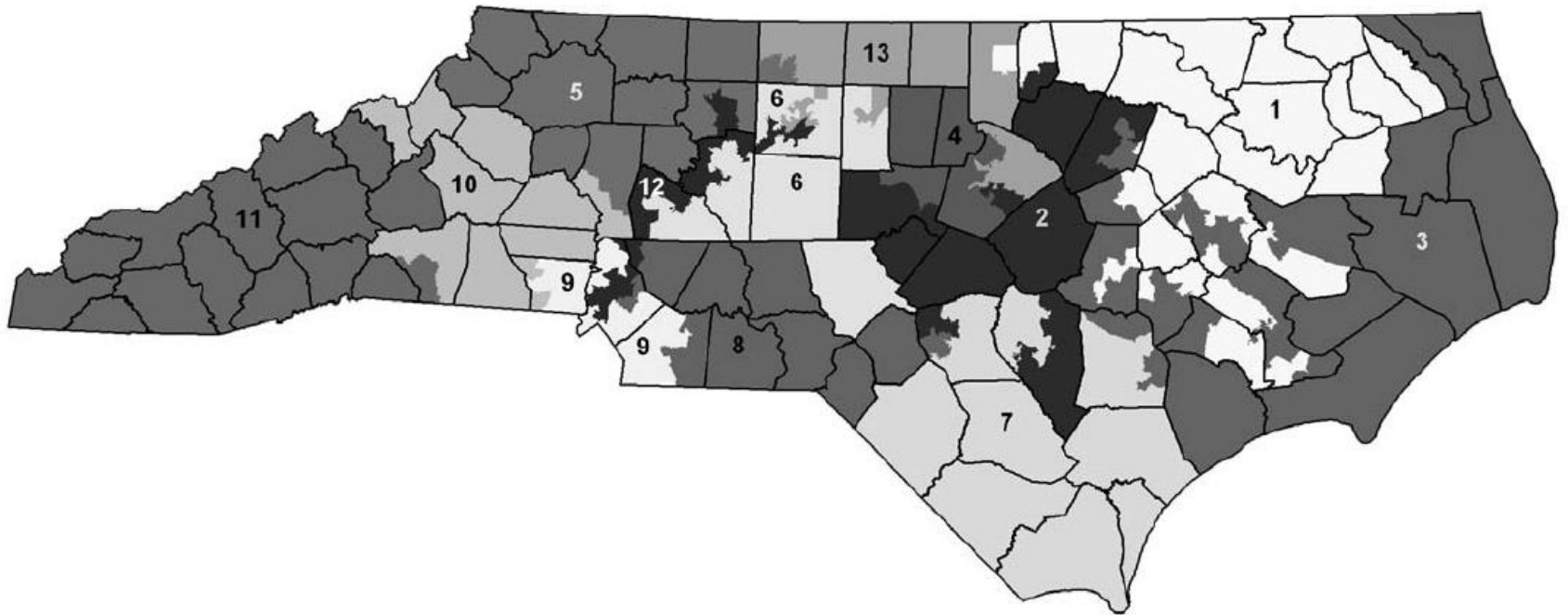
Figure 1.2 The Presidential-Coattail Explanation of Midterm Seat Losses



- 39 seats were needed for the GOP to take control of the 112th House (2011-12)
- 40 seats were held by Democrats whose district was lost by Obama in the 2008 presidential election

NC congressional districts

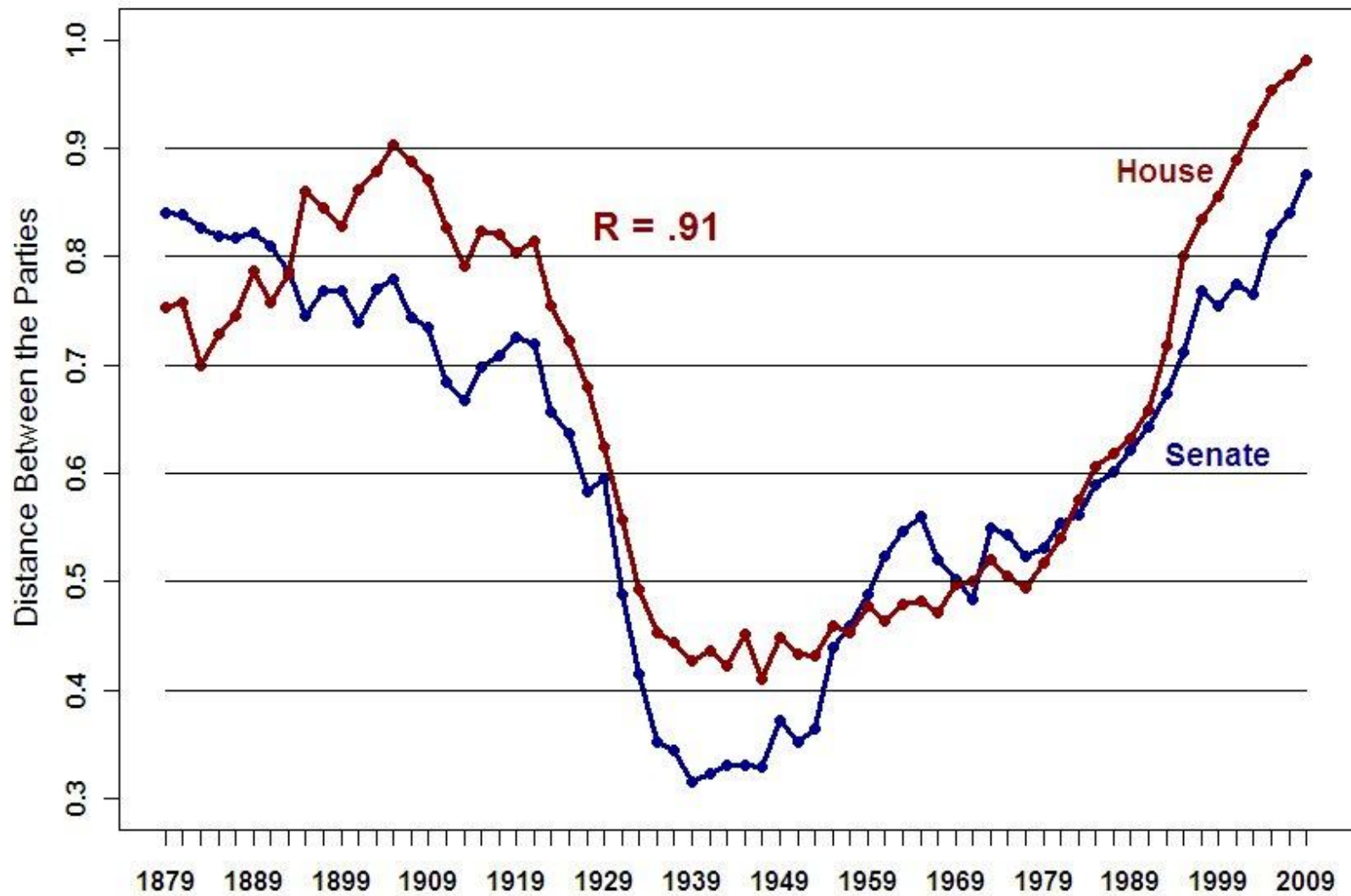
2006 N.C. Congressional Districts



Representative	District	Party	Roll-call vote Polarization Score	Rank	District Obama Vote in 2008	CandidateVote in 2010
WATT	12	Dem	-0.5	1	70%	64%
PRICE	4	Dem	-0.4	2	64%	57%
BUTTERFIELD	1	Dem	-0.4	3	62%	59%
MILLER	13	Dem	-0.3	4	59%	55%
ETHERIDGE*	2	Dem	-0.3	5	52%	*49%
KISSELL	8	Dem	-0.3	6	53%	53%
MCINTYRE	7	Dem	-0.2	7	47%	54%
SHULER	11	Dem	-0.1	8	47%	54%
JONES	3	Rep	0.3	9	38%	72%
MCHENRY	10	Rep	0.7	10	36%	71%
COBLE	6	Rep	0.7	11	36%	75%
FOXX	5	Rep	0.8	12	38%	66%
MYRICK	9	Rep	0.8	13	45%	69%
NC's U.S. House delegation average score			0.1		50%	61%

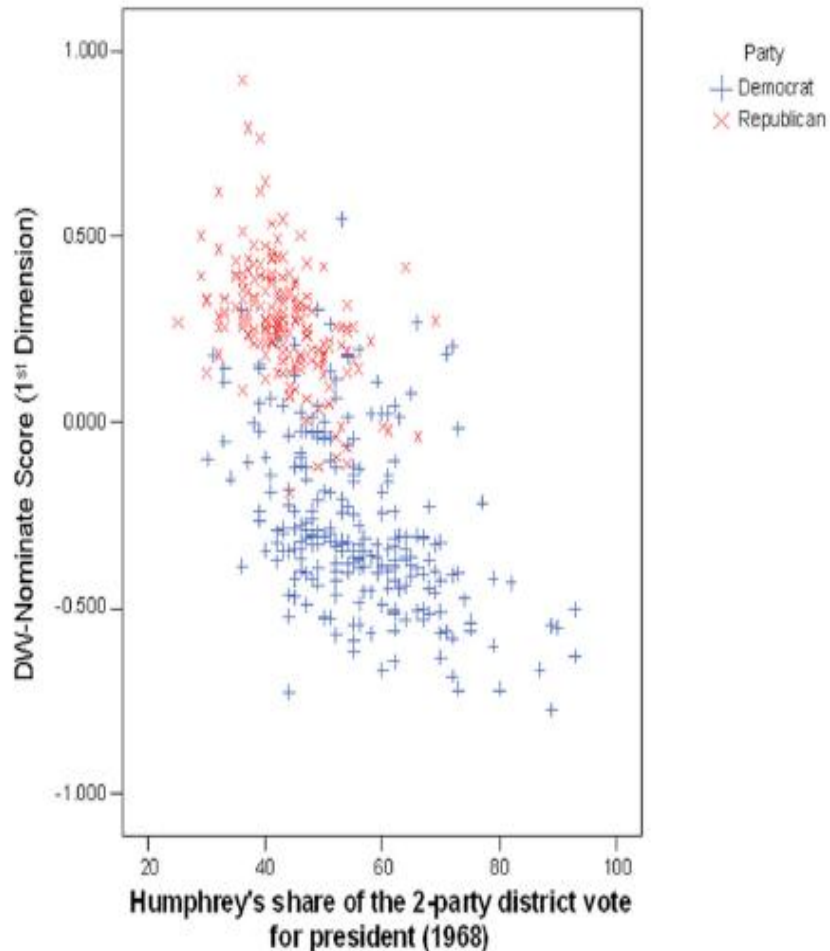
*Renee Ellmers (R) defeated incumbent Bob Etheridge (D) in District 2 with less than a 1% margin

Party Polarization 1879-2009
Distance Between the Parties First Dimension



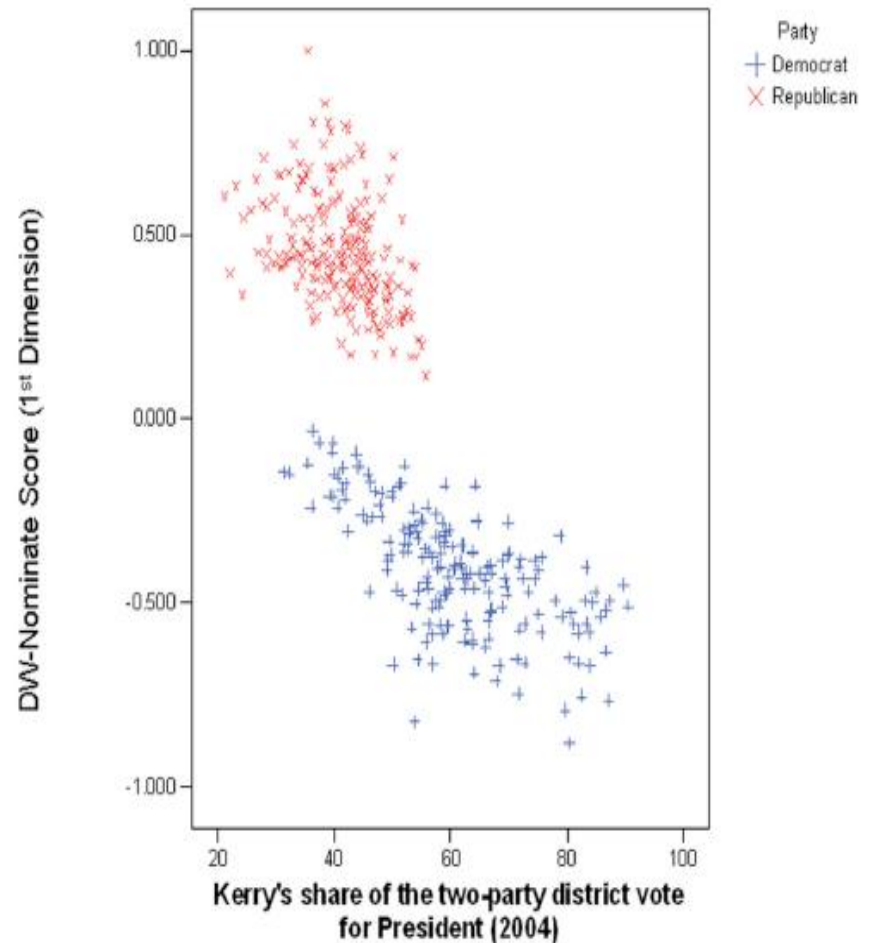
91st Congress (1969-70):

Figure 2. House Member's Ideological Location by District Presidential Vote (91st Congress, 1969-1970)



108th Congress (2003-04):

Figure 3. House Member's Ideological Location by District Presidential Vote (108th Congress, 2003-2004)



The role of public opinion in voting

■ Long-term factors

- Group identifications
 - Party
 - Region
 - Gender
 - Age
 - Race/ethnicity
- Ideology
 - Liberal
 - Conservative
 - Libertarian
 - Populist

■ Short-term factors

- Candidate evaluations
 - Competence
 - Honesty
- Issue attitudes
 - Salience
 - Policy preference

**Instant
polling:**

**using clickers
in the
classroom**

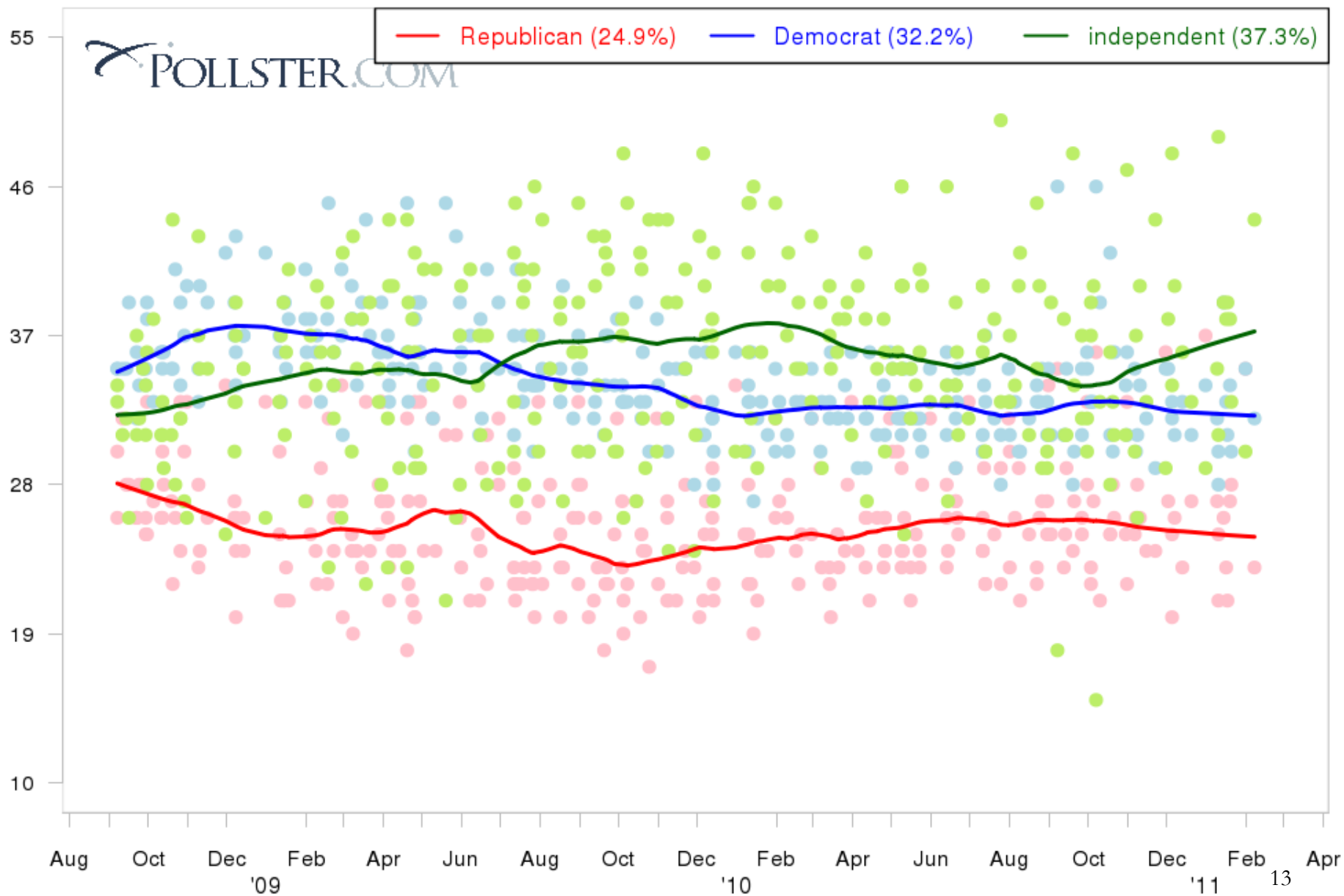


Generally speaking, do
you usually think of
yourself as a:

- X** A. Republican,
- X** B. Democrat,
- X** C. Independent?

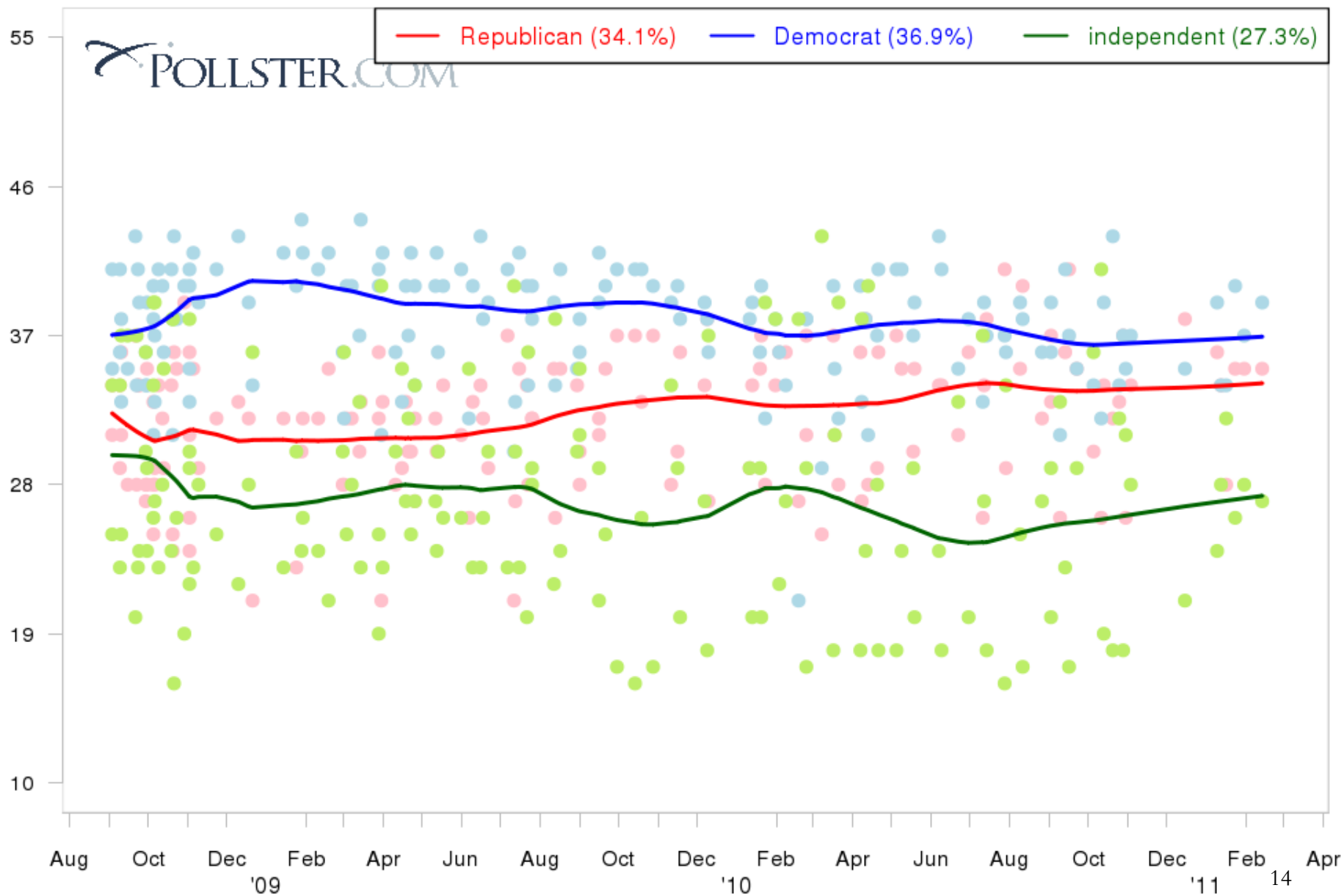
National Party Identification (ALL ADULTS)

Latest Poll: 02/07/2011



National Party ID (REGISTERED & LIKELY VOTERS ONLY)

Latest Poll: 02/13/2011

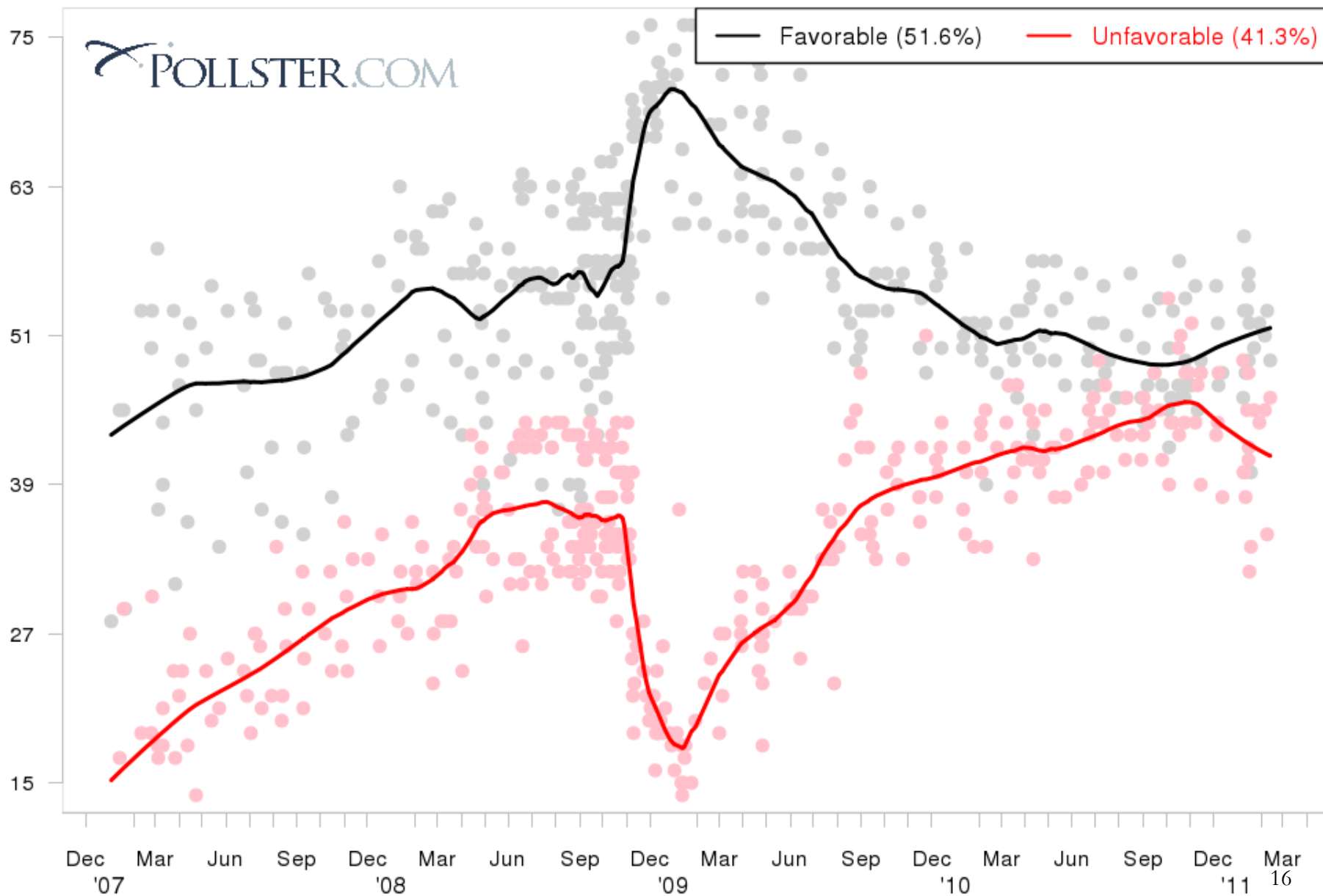


Do you approve or
disapprove of the way
Barack Obama is
handling his job as
president?

- ☒ A. Approve
- ☒ B. Disapprove

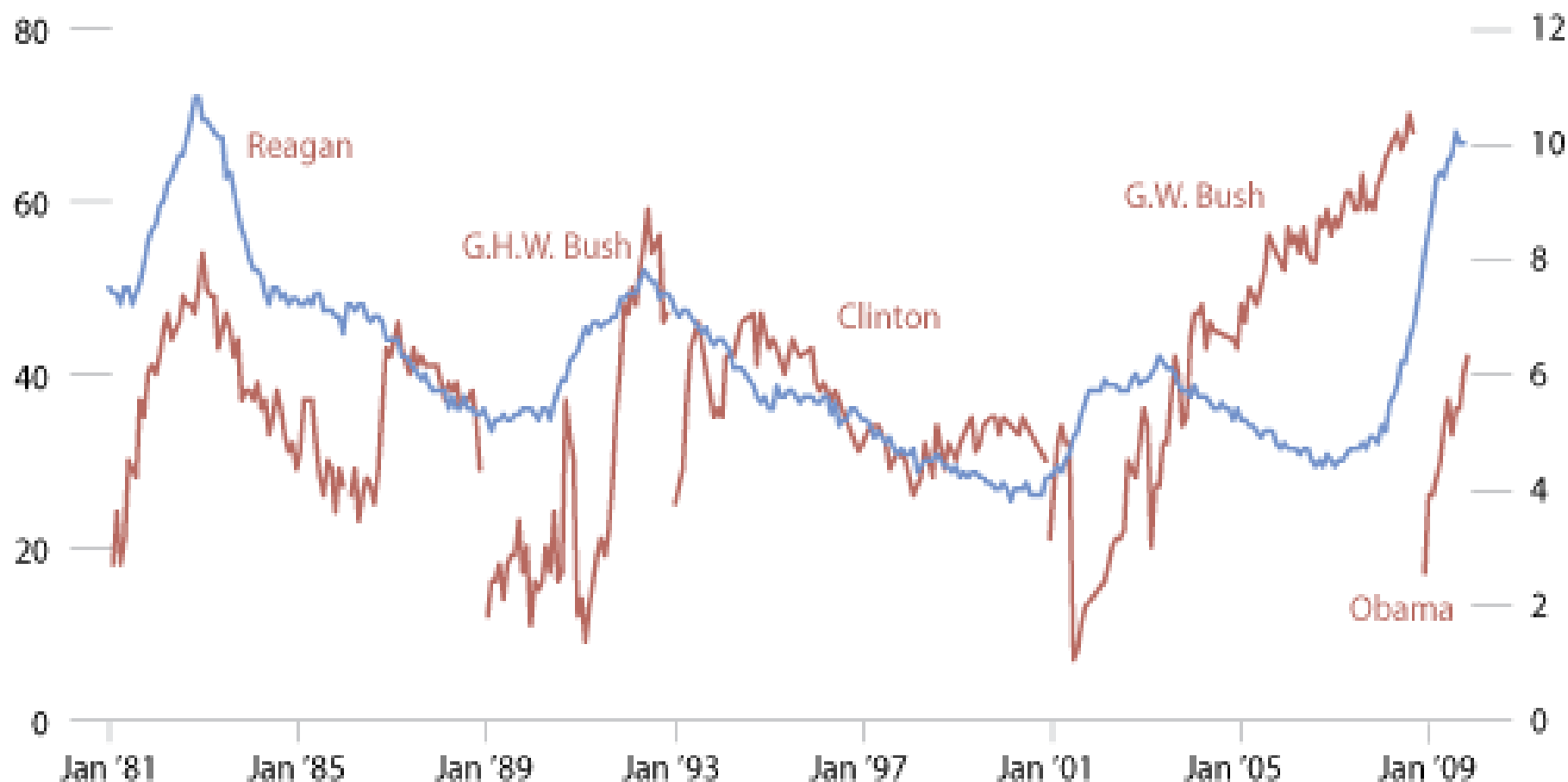
Barack Obama Favorable/Unfavorable Rating

Latest Poll: 02/13/2011



Unemployment vs. Presidential Disapproval

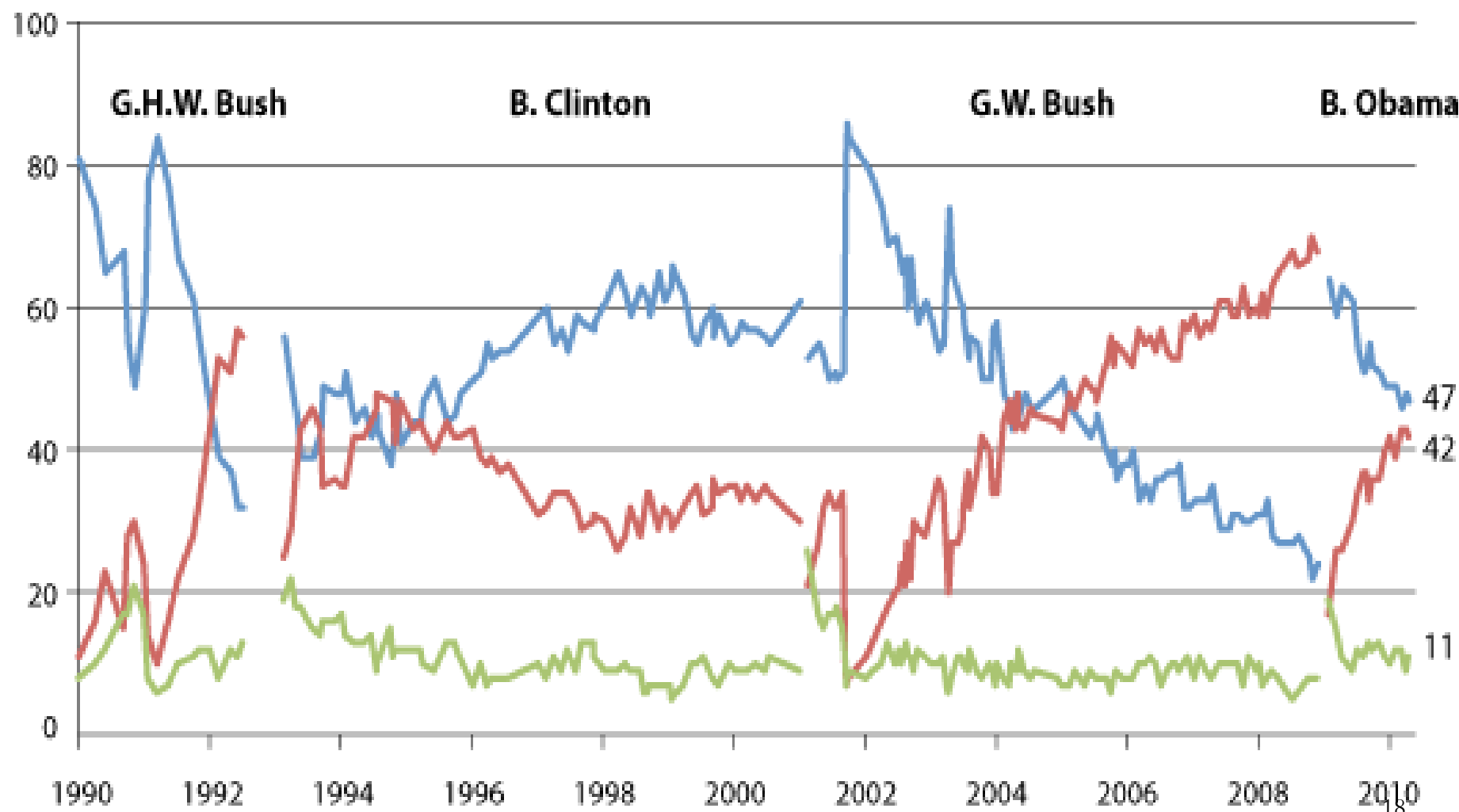
— Presidential Disapproval — National Unemployment Rate



Presidential Approval, 1990-2010

Pew Research Center for the People & the Press

Approve Disapprove DK/Refused

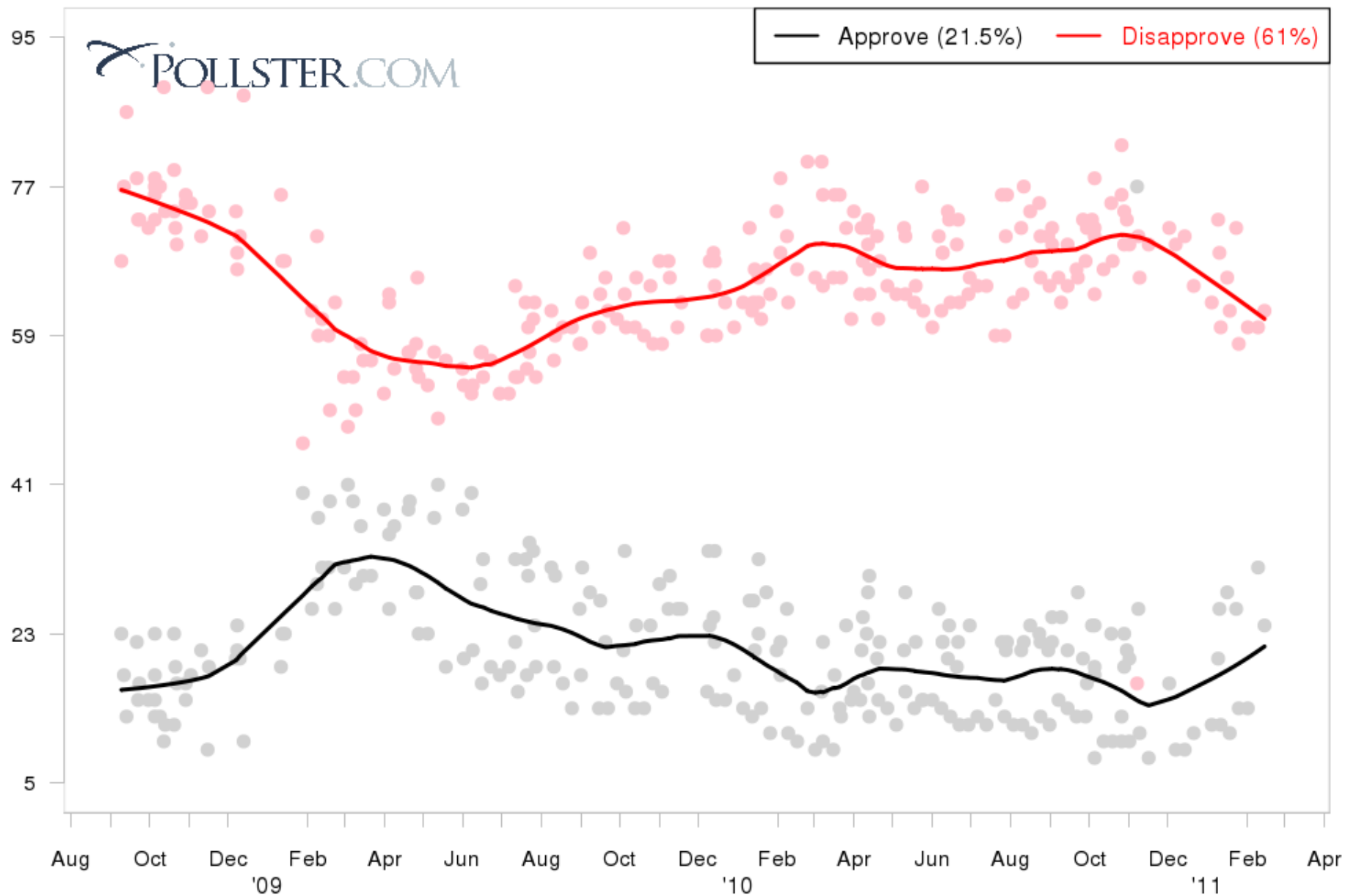


Do you approve or
disapprove
of the way Congress
is handling its job?

- X** A. Approve
- X** B. Disapprove

Congressional Job Approval

Latest Poll: 02/14/2011



How do you rate the U.S. economy –

x A. Excellent/good

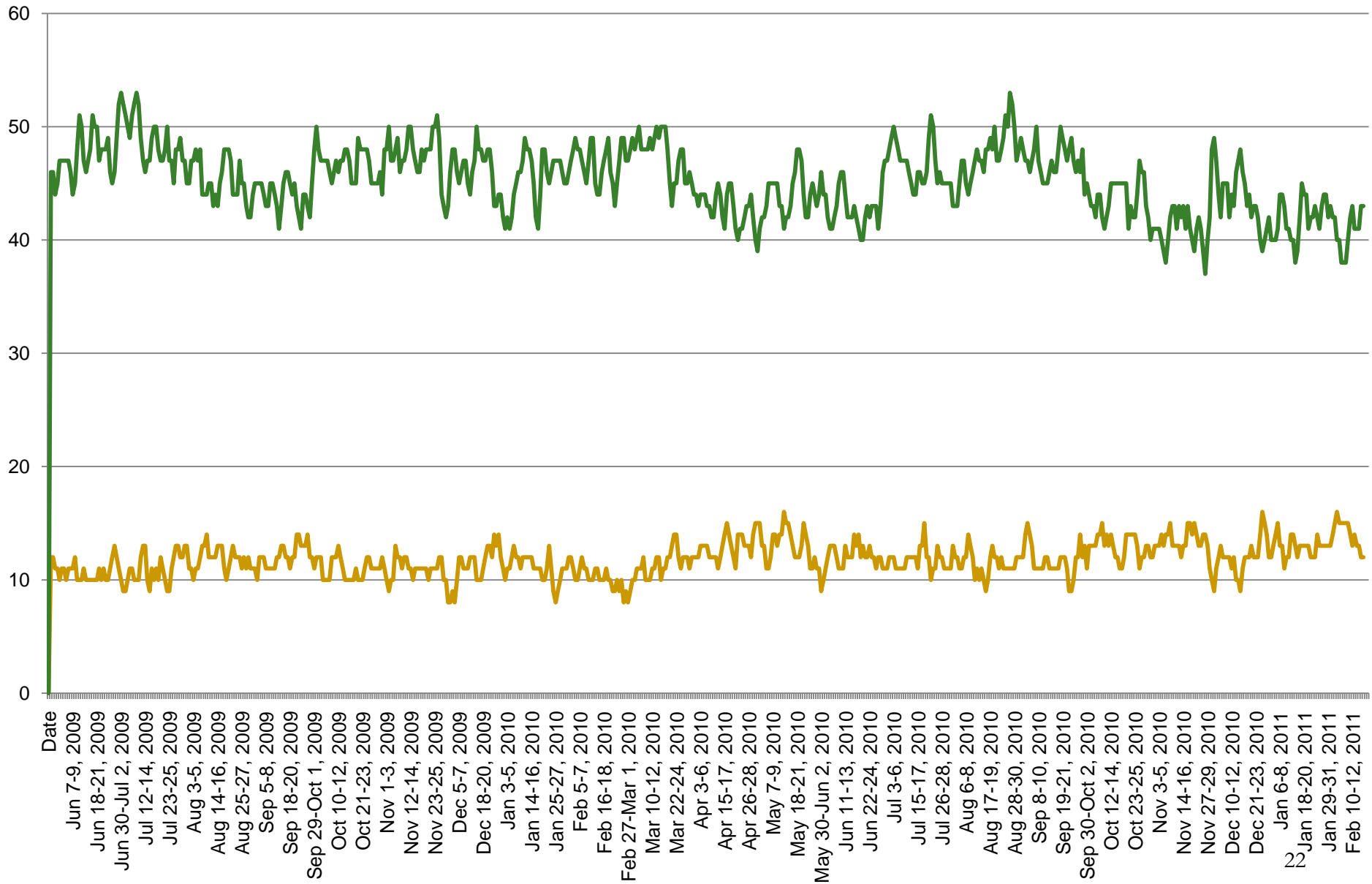
x B. Fair/poor



[Default]
[MC Any]
[MC All]

Gallup Poll: U.S. Economic Conditions – Jan 2009 – Feb 2011

% poor v. % excellent/good



Was the government
bailout of banks and
financial institutions (also
known as TARP) passed
and signed into law under:

- ☒ A. Pres. George W. Bush
- ☒ B. Pres. Barack Obama
- ☒ C. Don't know / not sure

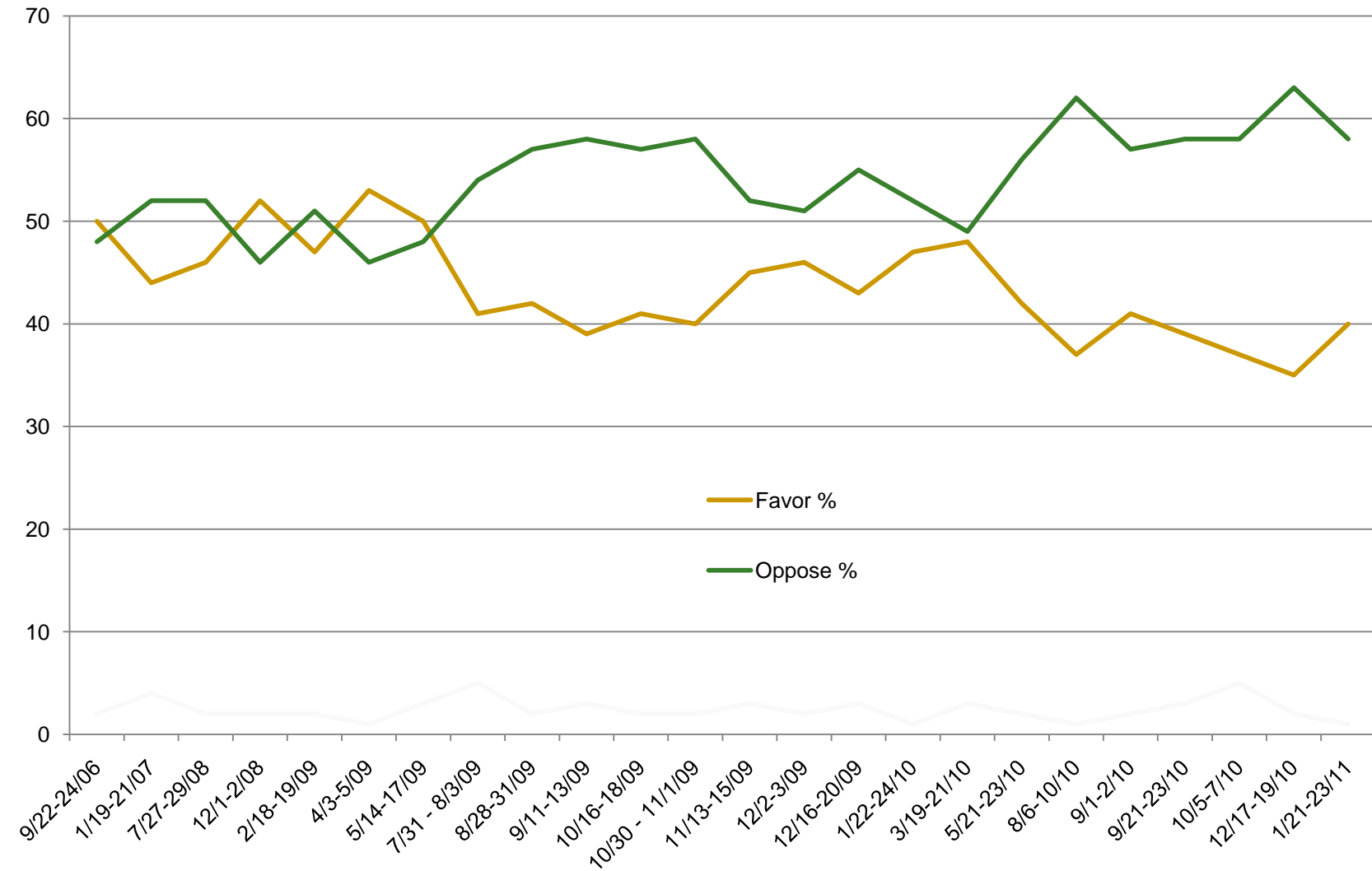
TARP was enacted under which president:

- | | |
|---------------------------|-----|
| A. Bush | 34% |
| B. Obama | 47% |
| C. Don't know / no answer | 19% |

Do you favor or oppose
the U.S. war in
Afghanistan?

- ☒ A. Favor
- ☒ B. Oppose
- ☒ C. Not sure

Do you favor or oppose the U.S. war in Afghanistan?



Ending tax cuts
on annual income above
\$250,000 would ...

- ☒ A. Help the economy
- ☒ B. Hurt the economy
- ☒ C. Have no effect
- ☒ D. Don't know

Economic Impact of Ending Tax Cuts for Wealthy

Ending tax cuts on annual income above \$250,000 would...

	Total	Rep	Dem	Ind
Help the economy	26	14	37	26
Hurt the economy	39	60	32	33
No effect on the economy	26	20	25	32
Don't know	<u>9</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>9</u>
	100	100	100	100

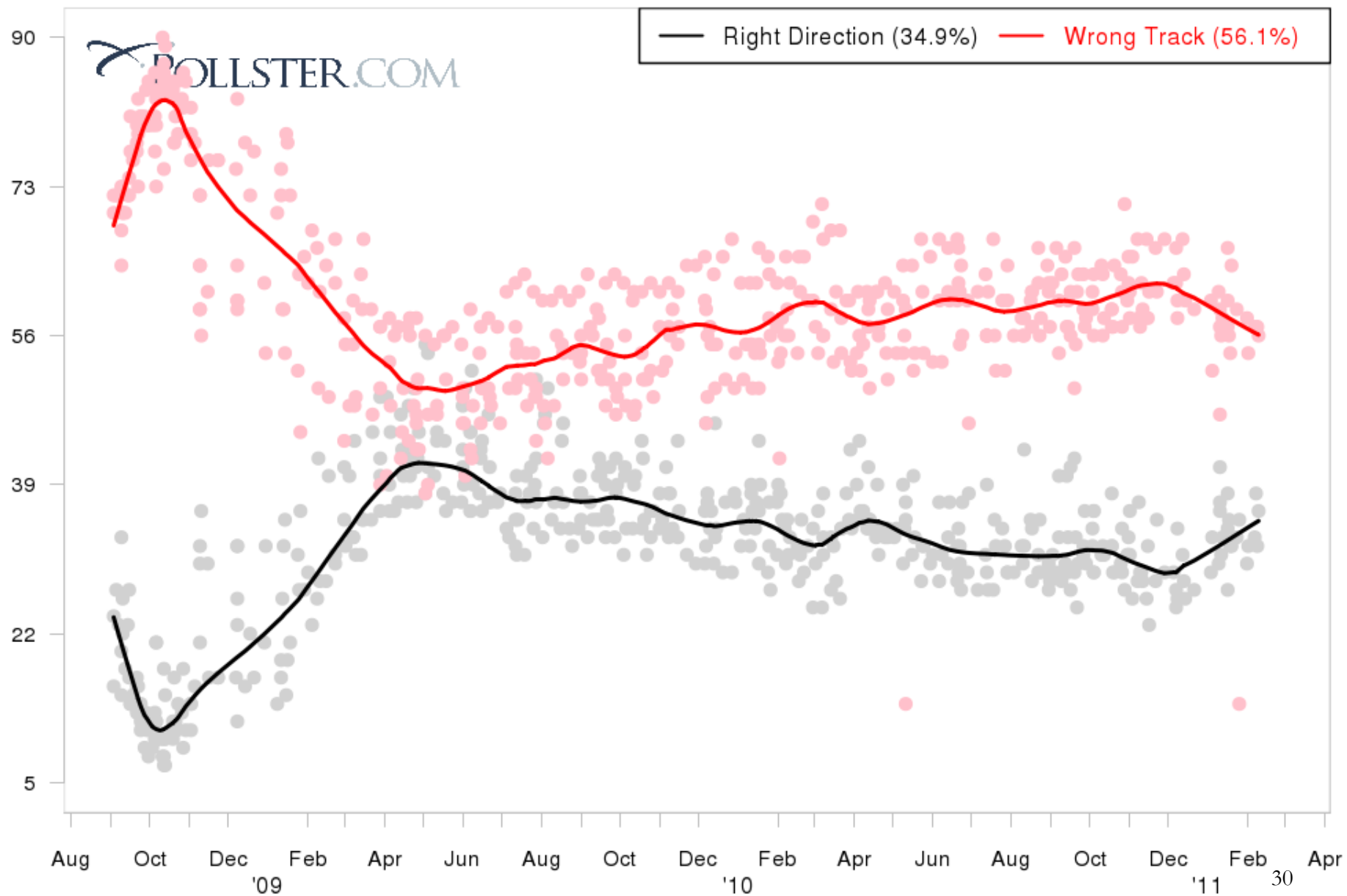
PEW RESEARCH CENTER/NATIONAL JOURNAL Sept. 16-19, 2010. Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding.

Would you say that the
U.S.
is on the:

- X** A. Right track
- X** B. Wrong track
- X** C. Don't know / not sure

State of the Country: Right Direction / Wrong Track

Latest Poll: 02/09/2011



Topics not covered

- Primary elections
- Election-campaign finance
- Communications media

Links to other useful polling & elections websites

http://people.uncw.edu/lowery/pls302/Survey_Data_Web_Sites/index.htm

Links to vote predictions

- D.C.'s *Political Report*,
 - *Washington Post's The Fix*,
 - *Campaign & Elections*,
 - *Congressional Quarterly's Roll Call Politics*,
 - *Cook Political Report*,
 - *National Journal's, Politics*,
 - *Rothenberg Political Report*,
 - *Larry Sabato's Crystal Ball*,
-