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Public Confidence in the State of the Nation

Public confidence in the State of the Nation has declined since the first inauguration of President Obama in 2009.

- The economy, unemployment, lack of jobs and other economic issues continue to be the most important concerns of a majority of Americans.
- A majority of Americans believes their children face a difficult future.

The findings of our report in January, 2009 indicated that President Obama was in a “honeymoon phase.” In that phase, what counts most is Presidential rhetoric: how forcefully and clearly the President articulates goals and policies that match the public’s own values and objectives.

The honeymoon period gave way to a new phase of public expectations that the President would produce positive results on the economic issues that affect them most directly. When asked to describe the Nation’s “most important problem” in their own words, more than two-thirds of Americans mentioned economic issues. No single non-economic issue – including immigration and gun control and healthcare was mentioned by more than 4% of Americans.

The failure to meet the public’s expectations for a more substantial economic revival has led to a decline of confidence in the President and in the State of the Nation. Public confidence in the President’s handling of the economy declined from 58% in 2009 to 46% in 2013. Overall confidence in the President declined from 64% to 53% while confidence in the Congress declined from 29% to 15%.

More than 6 out of 10 American’s believe the Country is still in a recession. Only 1 out of 4 Americans believes “the economy is getting better” or “this is a good time to find a quality job.” The economy is still weak and the number of unemployed and underemployed Americans remains at a visibly high level close to 20 million.

If President Obama’s efforts to solve non-economic problems such as immigration and gun control are not accompanied by even more visible efforts to solve the economic problems of jobs and economic growth, the President may find the public turning against him for not keeping his eye on the economy.

Although public confidence is low, a majority of Americans retains a favorable personal view of the President and hopes his economic policies will succeed in the future.