

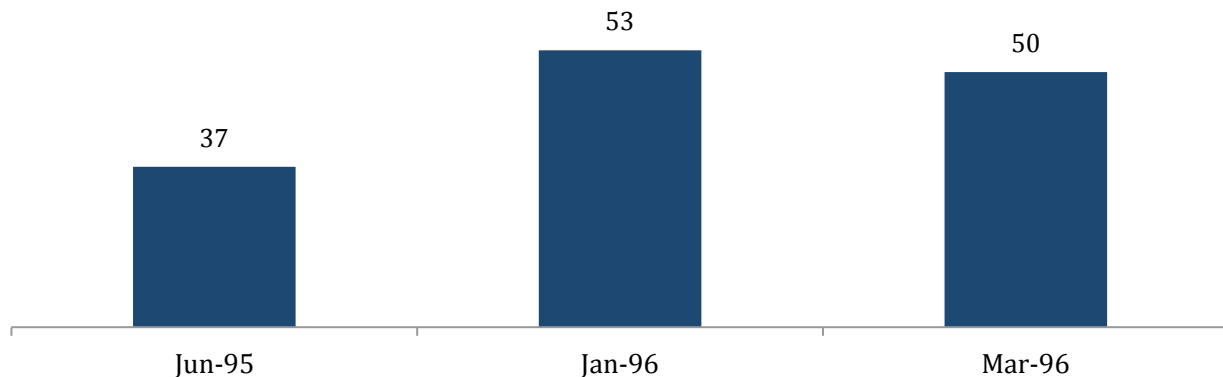
## Polling News & Notes

*Overlooked Recent Polling and Insights • April 7, 2011*

**Voters Saw Clinton as Strong Leader in Mid-90s Government Shutdowns:** As budget negotiations continue, the federal government draws closer to a shutdown set to start at midnight Friday. Many [observers](#) have noted similarities—and differences—between the current situation and 1995-1996, when the failure of President Clinton and congressional Republicans to reach a budget agreement caused the government to close twice between November 1995 and January 1996.

The shutdowns helped improve Clinton's political standing, boosting both his approval rating and perceptions of him as a strong leader. At the time, poll-watchers noted that, "the only time Clinton's ratings have improved substantially the past year as a result of his actions has been when he adopted a strategy of confrontation."<sup>1</sup> A look at Gallup polls shows that before the first shutdown, Clinton's approval rating was hovering in the mid-40s, but he saw a 7-point boost to 53% when the government shut down in mid-November 1995. His ratings tailed off during the second shutdown in late December 1995 and early January 1996, but quickly rose once the government re-opened, hitting as high as 54% by early March 1996. Clinton's approval rating ever again fell below 50% for the remainder of his presidency.

**Percent Rating President Clinton as a "Strong Leader"**  
(ABC News & CBS News Polls)



The budget showdowns also bolstered voters' views of Clinton as a strong leader. In a June 1995 ABC News poll, just 37% of Americans said they thought of Clinton as a strong leader, with 61% saying they did not. In January 1996, after the government shutdowns, 53% of Americans surveyed by CBS News said Clinton had strong qualities of leadership, and by March, ABC News polling again showed Clinton at 50% strong leader, 49% not—a net improvement of 25 points from the previous June.

While government shutdowns didn't jeopardize Republicans' hold on Congress, they helped President Clinton position himself for a successful 1996 re-election. President Obama's ratings as a strong leader have slipped this year—[Gallup polling](#) last week found he had dropped 8 points. Republicans should be careful not to let him recover as he gears up for his 2012 re-election campaign.

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas B. Edsall, *Confrontation Is the Key to Clinton's Popularity*, WASH. POST, Dec. 24, 1995, at A6.