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Majority of Americans distrust the government

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WASHINGTON (Reuters) - Nearly 80 percent of Americans say they do not trust the government to do what is right, expressing the highest level of distrust in Washington in half a century, according to a public opinion survey.

Only 22 percent of Americans say they trust the government "just about always" or "most of the time," according to the Pew Research Center survey released on Sunday.

Americans' trust in the federal government has been on a steady decline from a high of 73 percent during the Eisenhower administration in 1958, when the "trust" question was first posed in a national survey, the research center said.

Economic uncertainty, a highly partisan environment and overwhelming discontent with Congress and elected officials were all factors contributing to the current wave of public distrust, the report said.

The long, bitter debate over the healthcare law that President Barack Obama signed last month made negative feeling about government, particularly Congress, even worse, according to the report based on a series of surveys of some 5,000 people.

About 25 percent had a favorable opinion of Congress, the lowest in 25 years of surveying, and less than half (40 percent) said the Obama administration was doing an excellent or good job, Pew said.

Americans were found to be more frustrated than angry, with 56 percent expressing frustration with the federal government, compared with 21 percent who said they were angry.

Forty-three percent of Republicans, 50 percent of independents who lean Republican and 57 percent of those who agree with the Tea Party movement said the government presents a major threat to their personal freedom.

That compares with 18 percent of Democrats, 21 percent of independents who lean Democratic and 9 percent of those who disagree with the Tea Party movement.

The main survey of 2,505 adults was conducted March 11-21. Three other surveys of about 1,000 adults each were conducted March 18-21, April 1-5 and April 8-11. The margin of sampling error for the surveys is plus or minus 4 percentage points.

(Reporting by Joanne Allen, Editing by Vicki Allen)



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