# Americans Are Suspicious of Government

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Ordinarily I don't pay much attention to public opinion polls, but a recent one deserves comment. A Scripps Howard News Service/Ohio University national survey discovered that the majority of Americans believe that our government is guilty of big crimes and coverups.

The Great Society era of confidence that government can solve all our problems is gone, probably forever, and 66 percent now say that people are more angry with the Federal Government than they used to be.

In its place is widespread belief that government is not only not the solution to our problems, but is probably the cause of many of them.

People of every race, age, education level, economic status, and political leanings think that what the government is doing is making their lives worse rather than better. Cynicism and disillusionment are the bywords.

The survey showed that 51 percent believe it is either "very likely" or "somewhat likely" that federal officials were "directly responsible for the assassination of President Kennedy" in 1963. More than a third suspect that the Navy, either by accident or on purpose, shot down TWA Flight 800 in the Atlantic last year.

An even higher percentage suspect federal agents deliberately set the fires that killed 81 Branch Davidians in Waco four years ago. A majority believe it is possible that the CIA intentionally permitted Central American drug dealers to sell cocaine to inner-city blacks.

An amazing 41 percent said they believe it "very likely" that federal authorities are responsible for at least one of the above four tragedies. And, 38 percent said they believe at least one of these theories is "somewhat likely," while only 21 percent labeled all four as "unlikely."

Nearly half of Americans believe it is "very likely" that our government is "withholding what they know about nerve gas or germ warfare attacks on American troops during the Persian Gulf War." The common denominator of all these poll results is government coverup; Americans just don't believe their government is honest.

When observers were asked for their explanations for this depressing news, some said it is the legacy of Vietnam, Watergate, or Iran-Contra. Others blamed it on the fact that seven of Hollywood's ten highest-grossing films last year featured anti-government themes.

But suspicion of government dates from long before Vietnam. When asked about the belief that "President Roosevelt knew in advance that the Japanese were going to bomb Pearl Harbor, but did not warn our troops because he wanted to get the United States involved in World War II", the answer was a tossup: 42 percent said that is "very likely" or "somewhat likely" and 43 percent said it is "unlikely."

The malaise about government is particularly acute today among those who voted for a change in government in 1994 and 1996 and thought that Republicans would prove the old adage that "a new broom sweeps clean." Instead of fulfilling their promises to end the era of big government, the new Congressional leaders began to enjoy the perks of power and publicity.

The Republican leadership allowed the media to dictate their strategy and Clinton to choose the battleground. The media demanded that Republicans show "fairness" and "civility" by being "bipartisan" in their investigations of Waco, travelgate, and campaign finance "reform," and in their confirmations of Clinton's nominees.

But Republicans were not elected to make deals with Clinton; they were elected to find opportunities to defeat and checkmate him. Those who want one-party government can find it in plenty of other countries all around the world.

America is supposed to be a country with two parties, based on confrontation, advocacy, and energetic debate about real issues that people care about. Democracy isn't about getting along with the other branches or passing bills that the President is sure to sign.

Unfortunately, the perception outside the Beltway is that the leaders of both parties lie to us and to each other, and that both parties fundamentally agree on all major issues while they go on TV talk shows to tilt with windmills about details. The Republican leadership squabbles are not problems of "message" or

"communication" that a Dick Morris can fix.

The Republican Congressional leadership's agenda is all wrong. Republicans' number-one goal should be to cut taxes across the board for all taxpayers based on a significant cut in federal spending mischief.

Their three years of tinkering around with targeted tax cuts (i.e., you'll get a break only if you spend your money the way the government wants you to), a balanced budget, a balanced budget amendment, a line item veto, a $500 child tax credit, capital gains cuts, block grants, phony "saving" of Medicare, and flood relief have led Republicans into one dead-end disaster after another, all wholly predictable, with Clinton winning the PR battle every time.

Where are Republican leaders who will stand up and demand an across-the-board income tax cut? Where are Republican leaders who will say we are going to get the federal government out of the public school classroom, out of health care, out of social engineering, out of the arts, out of television, out of leftwing litigation, out of affirmative action, out of financing abortions, out of judicial activism, and out of foreign wars that are none of America's business?