
Robert Gates and Hillary Clinton Receive Top Ratings among Key Political Figures in Obama Administration and Congress

Americans divided on Vice President Joe Biden's job performance so far

ROCHESTER, N.Y. – March 25, 2009 – While a majority of Americans give President Obama positive ratings on his overall job performance ([The Harris Poll, March 23, 2009](#)), most other political figures are not as lucky. Among all Americans, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton comes out on top as just under half of Americans (49%) rate her job positively while 36% give her negative ratings and 15% say they are not familiar enough with her to have an opinion. Vice President Joe Biden comes in next with 35% of Americans giving him positive ratings and 35% giving him negative ratings. No other person is above 30% positive or above 50% negative because many Americans do not know enough about many of these individuals so they cannot provide an opinion.

These are some of the findings of The Harris Poll, a new nationwide survey of 2,355 U.S. adults surveyed online between March 9 and 16, 2009 by Harris Interactive.

When filtered by those familiar enough to have an opinion of these individuals, people do react strongly – both positively and negatively – about many of these individuals:

Two thirds of those familiar with him (67%) say they have a positive opinion of the job that Secretary of State Robert Gates is doing. Among those familiar with her, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's positive rating goes up to 58%;

Americans who are familiar with Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts also think highly of him as 62% give him positive marks for his job performance;

Americans who are familiar enough to have an opinion are divided about Vice President Joe Biden. Half (50%) give him positive ratings while half (50%) give him negative ratings;

The dominant issue with Americans is the economy, and economic leaders that are not highly regarded right now. Among those who are familiar with them, seven in ten (70%) give the Federal Reserve negative ratings while two-thirds (66%) give the Chairman of the Fed, Ben Bernanke negative ratings on his job. Treasury Secretary Tim Geithner doesn't fare much better as, among those familiar enough to have an opinion, two-thirds (67%) have a negative one of his job performance and one-third (33%) have a positive one;

When it comes to Congress and the two parties, the news isn't better. Among all Americans, just three in ten (29%) have a positive opinion of Congress with 71% having a negative one. This is definitely an improvement from the 10% positive rating Congress had in October right before the election. When it comes to the parties among those familiar with them, 62% have a negative opinion of Democrats in Congress while 75% have a negative opinion of Republicans in Congress; and,

Congressional leaders are not finding any coattails from positive opinion towards the President. Among those familiar enough to have an opinion, two-thirds give both Speaker Nancy Pelosi (66%) and Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (68%) negative ratings. Republicans leader don't fare much better – six in ten of those familiar with them give Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (62%) and House Minority Leader John Boehner (63%) negative ratings.

So What?

There are two stories here. First, among those who know them, people are still not inclined to carry over the good will they have for the President to many of his appointees or his party leaders in Congress. The second story is that even with amount of air time and news coverage that some of the administration's key economic teams are receiving, majorities of Americans are still not familiar with Treasury Secretary Geithner or Fed Chairman Bernanke. More Americans are familiar with every political figure on this list with the exception of the two Minority leaders in Congress than with the Treasury Secretary. This could be a double edged sword for the Administration. On one hand, people most likely will not blame him if things don't improve but, at the same time they won't give him credit if things do improve.

**TABLE 1
FAMILIARITY OF SENIOR CABINET MEMBERS, CONGRESSIONAL LEADERS AND PARTIES IN CONGRESS**

“Are you familiar enough with each of the following to have an opinion regarding them?”
Base: All adults

| | Familiar | Not familiar |
|--|-----------------|---------------------|
| | % | % |
| Secretary of State Hillary Clinton | 85 | 15 |
| Vice President Joe Biden | 70 | 30 |
| House Speaker Nancy Pelosi | 68 | 32 |
| Democrats in Congress | 66 | 34 |
| Republicans in Congress | 62 | 38 |
| The Federal Reserve | 59 | 41 |
| Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke | 42 | 58 |
| Chief Justice John Roberts | 40 | 60 |
| Defense Secretary Robert Gates | 40 | 60 |
| Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid | 39 | 61 |
| Treasury Secretary Tim Geithner | 35 | 65 |
| Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell | 27 | 73 |
| House Minority Leader John Boehner | 25 | 75 |

TABLE 2
RATINGS OF SENIOR CABINET MEMBERS, CONGRESSIONAL LEADERS AND PARTIES IN CONGRESS

"How would you rate the overall job each of the following are doing?"

Base: Familiar with each individual/entity

| | Positive* | Excellent | Pretty Good | Negative** | Only Fair | Poor |
|--|-----------|-----------|-------------|------------|-----------|------|
| | % | % | % | % | % | % |
| Defense Secretary Robert Gates | 67 | 18 | 50 | 33 | 24 | 8 |
| Chief Justice John Roberts | 62 | 21 | 41 | 38 | 26 | 12 |
| Secretary of State Hillary Clinton | 58 | 18 | 40 | 42 | 27 | 15 |
| Vice President Joe Biden | 50 | 15 | 35 | 50 | 26 | 24 |
| Democrats in Congress | 38 | 8 | 29 | 62 | 28 | 34 |
| Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell | 38 | 15 | 23 | 62 | 36 | 27 |
| House Minority Leader John Boehner | 37 | 18 | 19 | 63 | 34 | 28 |
| Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke | 34 | 11 | 23 | 66 | 44 | 22 |
| House Speaker Nancy Pelosi | 34 | 11 | 23 | 66 | 22 | 43 |
| Treasury Secretary Tim Geithner | 33 | 12 | 20 | 67 | 32 | 36 |
| Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid | 32 | 13 | 19 | 68 | 22 | 45 |
| The Federal Reserve | 30 | 8 | 22 | 70 | 47 | 23 |
| Republicans in Congress | 25 | 7 | 18 | 75 | 41 | 35 |

*Positive = excellent or pretty good **Negative = only fair or poor

TABLE 3
CONGRESS' OVERALL JOB RATING

"How would you rate the overall job the Congress is doing?"

Base: All adults

| | TREND | Positive* | Negative** |
|-------------|-----------|-----------|------------|
| | | % | % |
| 2009 | March | 29 | 71 |
| 2008 | October | 10 | 86 |
| | September | 16 | 81 |
| | August | 18 | 77 |
| | June | 13 | 83 |
| | April | 17 | 77 |
| | February | 20 | 76 |
| 2007 | December | 17 | 79 |
| | October | 20 | 77 |
| | September | 22 | 74 |
| | July | 24 | 72 |
| | April | 27 | 69 |
| | February | 33 | 62 |
| 2006 | September | 24 | 73 |
| | May | 18 | 80 |
| | February | 25 | 71 |
| | January | 25 | 72 |

*Positive = excellent or pretty good. **Negative = only fair or poor.

Note: Prior to March, 2009, this question was asked by telephone

TABLE 4
RATINGS OF SENIOR CABINET MEMBERS, CONGRESSIONAL LEADERS AND PARTIES IN CONGRESS

“How would you rate the overall job each of the following are doing?”

Base: All adults

| | Positive* | Excellent | Pretty Good | Negative** | Only Fair | Poor | Not Familiar |
|--|-----------|-----------|-------------|------------|-----------|------|--------------|
| | % | % | % | % | % | % | % |
| Secretary of State Hillary Clinton | 49 | 15 | 34 | 36 | 23 | 13 | 15 |
| Vice President Joe Biden | 35 | 11 | 24 | 35 | 18 | 17 | 30 |
| Defense Secretary Robert Gates | 27 | 7 | 20 | 13 | 10 | 3 | 60 |
| Democrats in Congress | 25 | 5 | 19 | 41 | 18 | 23 | 34 |
| Chief Justice John Roberts | 25 | 8 | 16 | 16 | 11 | 5 | 60 |
| House Speaker Nancy Pelosi | 23 | 8 | 16 | 45 | 15 | 30 | 32 |
| The Federal Reserve | 18 | 5 | 13 | 42 | 28 | 14 | 41 |
| Republicans in Congress | 15 | 4 | 11 | 47 | 25 | 22 | 38 |
| Federal Research Chairman Ben Bernanke | 14 | 5 | 10 | 28 | 19 | 9 | 58 |
| Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid | 12 | 5 | 8 | 26 | 9 | 18 | 61 |
| Treasury Secretary Tim Geithner | 11 | 4 | 7 | 24 | 11 | 12 | 65 |
| Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell | 10 | 4 | 6 | 17 | 10 | 7 | 73 |
| House Minority Leader John Boehner | 9 | 5 | 5 | 16 | 9 | 7 | 75 |

*Positive = excellent or pretty good **Negative = only fair or poor

Methodology

The Harris Poll was conducted online within the United States March 9 and 16, 2008, among 2,355 adults (aged 18 and over). Figures for age, sex, race/ethnicity, education, region and household income were weighted where necessary to bring them into line with their actual proportions in the population. Propensity score weighting was also used to adjust for respondents’ propensity to be online.

All sample surveys and polls, whether or not they use probability sampling, are subject to multiple sources of error which are most often not possible to quantify or estimate, including sampling error, coverage error, error associated with nonresponse, error associated with question wording and response options, and post-survey weighting and adjustments. Therefore, Harris Interactive avoids the words “margin of error” as they are misleading. All that can be calculated are different possible sampling errors with different probabilities for pure, unweighted, random samples with 100% response rates. These are only theoretical because no published polls come close to this ideal.

Respondents for this survey were selected from among those who have agreed to participate in Harris Interactive surveys. The data have been weighted to reflect the composition of the adult population. Because the sample is based on those who agreed to participate in the Harris Interactive panel, no estimates of theoretical sampling error can be calculated.

These statements conform to the principles of disclosure of the National Council on Public Polls.

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