

Congress' Approval Rating At Lowest Point for Year

Hillary Clinton only Administration official with positive ratings

Rochester, N.Y. — September 2, 2009 — As the fall season begins, the focus moves away from town hall meetings and what is going on around the country back to how people in Washington are dealing with the issues, especially health care reform. Unfortunately, many in Washington are not dealing from strong positions, including the [president](#) himself, in terms of their approval ratings. In fact, when it comes to many of the leaders of Congress as well as those handling economic issues, majorities of Americans are not even familiar enough with these people to have an opinion regarding them.

These are some of the results of The Harris Poll of 2,498 U.S. adults surveyed online between August 10 and 18, 2009 by Harris Interactive.

Administration Leaders' Ratings

The rating of individual leaders in the government varies greatly:

- Secretary of State Hillary Clinton is the only member of the administration to have a positive job rating. Just over half of Americans (51%) give her positive marks, while 31% give her negative ratings and 18% are not familiar enough with her to have an opinion;
- Vice President Joe Biden is rated more negatively (38%) than positively (33%) while 29% are not familiar enough to have an opinion;
- Just over one-quarter of Americans (28%) give Defense Secretary Robert Gates positive ratings while 17% give him negative ones, but a majority (55%) are not familiar with him;
- One in five Americans (20%) rate Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke positively, one-quarter (24%) rate his job performance negatively and 56% are not familiar enough with him to have an opinion; and,
- Treasury Secretary Tim Geithner is rated positively by 17% of Americans, negatively by 26% and 57% are not familiar with him.

Congressional Ratings

Looking at Congress as a whole, their numbers continue to move downward. In May, they were at a high with 31% giving Congress positive ratings, but in June this dropped to 25% positive and currently just 22% give them positive ratings while almost four in five Americans (78%) give them negative ones. The rating of individual parties and leaders in Congress are not any better:

- One in five Americans (21%) give Democrats in Congress positive ratings while 47% give them negative ones and one-third (32%) say they are not familiar enough to have an opinion;
- Even lower numbers (12%) give Republicans in Congress positive ratings and over half (52%) give them negative ones while 37% are not familiar with them;

- Looking at House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, 19% of Americans give her job positive marks but almost half (48%) give her negative ones and one-third (33%) are not familiar with her;
- However, her familiarity is better than any of the other leaders in Congress. Staying in the House, three-quarter of Americans (73%) are not familiar with House Minority Leader John Boehner, with 8% giving him positive ratings and 19% negative marks; and
- Three in five Americans (61%) are not familiar with Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, while 10% give him positive marks and 29% give him negative ones. On the other side of the aisle, 72% of Americans are not familiar enough with Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell to have an opinion, 8% give him positive marks and 20% give him negative ratings.

So What?

In order for President Obama to accomplish many of his goals, he will need Congress to help him. However, they do not have the political capital to go to the American public and ask for support for many of these plans. And, among his Cabinet officials, only Secretary of State Clinton is seen in a positive light, so that will also not be of any help in selling health care reform to an already wary public.

**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				
	March	April	May	June	Aug.
	%	%	%	%	%
Secretary of State Hillary Clinton	85	83	83	81	82
Vice President Joe Biden	70	67	69	68	71
House Speaker Nancy Pelosi	68	65	66	66	67
Democrats in Congress	66	64	64	65	68
Republicans in Congress	62	61	59	58	63
Defense Secretary Robert Gates	40	44	43	42	45
Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke	42	43	43	41	44
Treasury Secretary Tim Geithner	35	44	41	39	43
Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell	38	n/a	n/a	n/a	28
Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid	32	n/a	n/a	n/a	39
House Minority Leader John Boehner	37	n/a	n/a	n/a	27

Note: N/a indicates not asked

**TABLE 2
CONGRESS' OVERALL JOB RATING**

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

Base: All adults

	TREND	Positive*	Negative**
		%	%
2009	Aug.	22	78
	June	25	75
	May	31	69
	April	29	71
	March	29	71
2008	October	10	86
	September	16	81
	August	18	77
	June	13	83
	February	20	76
2007	December	17	79
	October	20	77
	September	22	74
	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 3
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	51	16	36	31	19	12	18
Vice President Joe Biden	33	6	27	38	20	18	29
Defense Secretary Robert Gates	28	6	22	17	11	5	55
Democrats in Congress	21	3	18	47	22	25	32
Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke	20	4	16	24	16	9	56
House Speaker Nancy Pelosi	19	3	16	48	17	31	33
Treasury Secretary Tim Geithner	17	3	14	26	11	15	57
Republicans in Congress	12	1	11	52	27	25	37
Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid	10	2	8	29	11	17	61
Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell	8	2	6	20	10	10	72
House Minority Leader John Boehner	8	2	6	19	7	11	73

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

TABLE 4
RATING OF VICE-PRESIDENT JOE BIDEN

How would you rate the job Vice-President Joe Biden is doing?”

Base: All adults

		Positive*	Negative**	Not Familiar
Aug.	%	33	38	29
June	%	30	38	32
May	%	32	36	31
April	%	34	32	33
March	%	35	35	30

*Excellent or pretty good. **Only fair or poor.

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% because of rounding.

TABLE 5
RATING OF SECRETARY OF STATE HILLARY CLINTON

How would you rate the job Secretary of State Hillary Clinton is doing?"

Base: All adults

		Positive*	Negative**	Not Familiar
Aug.	%	51	31	18
June	%	47	34	19
May	%	50	33	17
April	%	51	32	17
March	%	49	36	15

*Excellent or pretty good. **Only fair or poor.

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% because of rounding.

TABLE 6
RATING OF DEFENSE SECRETARY ROBERT GATES

How would you rate the job Defense Secretary Robert Gates is doing?"

Base: All adults

		Positive*	Negative**	Not Familiar
Aug.	%	28	17	55
June	%	28	13	58
May	%	28	15	57
April	%	30	14	56
March	%	27	13	60

*Excellent or pretty good. **Only fair or poor.

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% because of rounding.

TABLE 7
RATING OF TREASURY SECRETARY TIM GEITHNER

How would you rate the job Treasury Secretary Tim Geithner is doing?"

Base: All adults

		Positive*	Negative**	Not Familiar
Aug.	%	17	26	57
June	%	15	24	61
May	%	16	26	59
April	%	18	26	56
March	%	11	24	65

*Excellent or pretty good. **Only fair or poor.

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% because of rounding.

TABLE 8
RATING OF HOUSE SPEAKER NANCY PELOSI
 How would you rate the job House Speaker Nancy Pelosi is doing?"

Base: All adults

		Positive*	Negative**	Not Familiar
Aug.	%	19	48	33
June	%	18	49	34
May	%	21	45	34
April	%	21	44	35
March	%	23	45	32

*Excellent or pretty good. **Only fair or poor.

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% because of rounding.

TABLE 9
RATING OF FEDERAL RESERVE CHAIRMAN BEN BERNANKE
 How would you rate the job Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke is doing?"

Base: All adults

		Positive*	Negative**	Not Familiar
Aug.	%	20	24	56
June	%	18	23	59
May	%	19	24	57
April	%	20	23	57
March	%	14	28	58

*Excellent or pretty good. **Only fair or poor.

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% because of rounding.

TABLE 10
RATING OF DEMOCRATS IN CONGRESS
 How would you rate the job the Democrats in Congress are doing?"

Base: All adults

		Positive*	Negative**	Not Familiar
Aug.	%	21	47	32
June	%	21	43	35
May	%	25	39	36
April	%	22	42	36
March	%	25	41	34

*Excellent or pretty good. **Only fair or poor.

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% because of rounding.

TABLE 11
RATING OF REPUBLICANS IN CONGRESS

How would you rate the job the Republicans in Congress are doing?"

Base: All adults

		Positive*	Negative**	Not Familiar
Aug.	%	12	52	37
June	%	12	46	42
May	%	14	45	41
April	%	14	48	39
March	%	15	47	38

*Excellent or pretty good. **Only fair or poor.

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% because of rounding.

TABLE 12
RATING OF SENATE MINORITY LEADER MITCH MCCONNELL

How would you rate the job Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell is doing?"

Base: All adults

		Positive*	Negative**	Not Familiar
Aug.	%	8	20	72
March	%	10	17	73

*Excellent or pretty good. **Only fair or poor.

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% because of rounding.

TABLE 13
RATING OF SENATE MAJORITY LEADER HARRY REID

How would you rate the job Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid is doing?"

Base: All adults

		Positive*	Negative**	Not Familiar
Aug.	%	10	29	61
March	%	12	26	61

*Excellent or pretty good. **Only fair or poor.

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% because of rounding.

TABLE 14
RATING OF HOUSE MINORITY LEADER JOHN BOEHNER

How would you rate the job House Minority Leader John Boehner is doing?"

Base: All adults

		Positive*	Negative**	Not Familiar
Aug.	%	8	19	73
March	%	9	16	75

*Excellent or pretty good. **Only fair or poor.

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% because of

Methodology

This Harris Poll was conducted online within the United States August 10 and 18, 2009, among 2,984 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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