

Most Leaders in D.C. Have Many More Critics than Admirers – Especially Congress

Clinton most popular Cabinet member

New York, N.Y. — September 30, 2009 — A new Harris Poll highlights the low opinions many people have of most of our political leaders in Washington. Criticisms of the Congress are particularly strong, with the Republicans in Congress having even worse numbers than the Democrats. Perhaps the best finding for some political leaders who were rated is that very large numbers of people are not familiar enough with them to rate them at all.

These are some of the results of The Harris Poll of 2,334 adults surveyed online between September 8 and 15, 2009 by Harris Interactive.

The main findings are:

- While two-thirds or more of all adults are familiar with Secretary of State Hilary Clinton (82%), Vice President Joe Biden (70%), House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (69%) and the Congressional Democrats (69%), and Republicans (65%), most adults are *not* familiar enough with Federal Bank Chairman Ben Bernanke (52%), Defense Secretary Bob Gates (55%), or Treasury Secretary Tim Geithner (58%) to have any opinion of them.
- Of all those rated, Hilary Clinton gets the best ratings, 48% positive and 34% negative.
- The two other leaders who receive more positive than negative ratings (but with most adults unfamiliar with them) are Robert Gates (28% positive, 18% negative) and Ben Bernanke (25% positive, 23% negative).
- Those who receive more negative than positive ratings are Joe Biden (by 41% to 30%), Nancy Pelosi (by 49% to 20%), and Tim Geithner (by 26% to 16%).
- Nancy Pelosi's high negatives reflect the widespread unpopularity of the Congress generally. A huge 81% to 19% give Congress negative ratings and large numbers give both parties in Congress poor marks – the Democrats by 51% to 18%, and the Republicans by an even worse 54% to 11%.

So what?

These low ratings surely reflect the public's sour opinions of Washington generally at this time. Obviously, they are not good news for the president or the Democratic leaders. The only comfort they can draw from these numbers is that the public is even more critical of the Republicans than of the Democrats in D.C. This suggests that the easiest way for the administration to defend its proposals – for health care, economic policy, climate change or energy policy – may be to ask, "Which do you prefer: our proposals or those of the Republican members of Congress?"

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.	Sept.
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Secretary of State Hillary Clinton	85	83	83	81	82	82
Vice President Joe Biden	70	67	69	68	71	70
House Speaker Nancy Pelosi	68	65	66	66	67	69
Democrats in Congress	66	64	64	65	68	69
Republicans in Congress	62	61	59	58	63	65
Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke	42	43	43	41	44	48
Defense Secretary Robert Gates	40	44	43	42	45	46
Treasury Secretary Tim Geithner	35	44	41	39	43	42

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	Sept.	19	81
	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	48	10	37	34	22	13	18
Vice President Joe Biden	30	5	24	41	22	19	30
Defense Secretary Robert Gates	28	6	22	18	14	4	54
Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke	25	4	21	23	16	7	52
House Speaker Nancy Pelosi	20	3	17	49	17	32	31
Democrats in Congress	18	2	16	51	24	27	31
Treasury Secretary Tim Geithner	16	2	14	26	13	12	58
Republicans in Congress	11	1	10	54	28	26	35

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

TABLE 4
RATING OF VICE-PRESIDENT JOE BIDEN - TREND
 How would you rate the job Vice-President Joe Biden is doing?”

Base: All adults

		Positive*	Negative**	Not Familiar
Sept.	%	30	41	30
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 – TREND
 How would you rate the job Secretary of State Hillary Clinton is doing?"

Base: All adults

		Positive*	Negative**	Not Familiar
Sept.	%	48	34	18
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 – TREND
 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 – TREND
 How would you rate the job Treasury Secretary Tim Geithner is doing?"

Base: All adults

		Positive*	Negative**	Not Familiar
Sept.	%	16	26	58
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 – TREND
 How would you rate the job House Speaker Nancy Pelosi is doing?"

Base: All adults

		Positive*	Negative**	Not Familiar
Sept.	%	20	49	31
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 – TREND
 How would you rate the job Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke is doing?"

Base: All adults

		Positive*	Negative**	Not Familiar
Sept.	%	25	23	52
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 – TREND
 How would you rate the job the Democrats in Congress are doing?"

Base: All adults

		Positive*	Negative**	Not Familiar
Sept.	%	18	51	31
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 – TREND
 How would you rate the job the Republicans in Congress are doing?"

Base: All adults

		Positive*	Negative**	Not Familiar
Sept.	%	11	54	35
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.

Methodology

This *Harris Poll* was conducted online within the United States September 8 and 15, 2009, among 2,334 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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