

'TIS THE SEASON ... TO DISLIKE WASHINGTON LEADERS, ESPECIALLY CONGRESS

Citizen ire toward elected officials in our nation's capital is broad and deep, according to the most recent national survey from Fairleigh Dickinson University's PublicMind. The numbers tell a story of discontent and frustration, as attitudes toward Congress, the president, and health of the nation take a sharp and painful turn toward angst.

Right now, eight percent of Americans approve of the job Congress is doing, barely a third (34%) evaluate the president positively, and the majority (58%) say the country is headed down the wrong track. President Obama's job approval is down considerably from where it has been over the past 12 months. A year ago, in December 2012, almost half of the respondents evaluated his leadership positively, and in April of this year that number remained virtually unchanged at 46 percent.

"The recently proposed bipartisan budget deal was not enough to redeem the president and Congress in the eyes of Americans," said Krista Jenkins, professor of political science and director of PublicMind. "Neither branch can claim a connection with those they represent, although the abysmal numbers for Congress make the president's 34 percent job approval look positively cheery."

Unlike public attitudes toward Congress, there is some degree of variation in attitudes toward the president. Democrats remain significantly more likely to approve of his job performance (66%) as compared to Republicans (7%) or independents (43%), and non-whites are more than twice as likely to approve of the president than whites (55 versus 27%, respectively).

"The president's overall disapproval, and 57 percent disapproval among political independents is an important sign for the midterm elections, even though we're still months away from voters and voting booths," said Jenkins. "These all important swing voters will be needed if either side wants to claim victory in 2014."

As for Congress, unhappiness with elected officials can be seen everywhere. Democrats (84%), independents (75%), and Republicans (84%), men (85%) and women (80%), whites (86%) and people of color (73%) all agree that disapproval reigns when considering the job performance of Congress. "Disliking Congress appears to be the one political thing that Americans can agree on right now," said Jenkins.

The same poll finds that neither major political party is perceived as representing the interests of average Americans. Twenty-nine percent say Republicans are better at looking out for American interests,

with similar numbers extended to Democrats (35%). An additional third (32%) say that both or neither party represents them.

Women decidedly choose Democrats (41%) over Republicans (28%), while men are evenly divided in their perceptions of Republicans (30%) and Democrats (28%). The all-important independents are the most uncertain. Two-thirds (67%) fail to identify with either the Republican or Democratic party as the one most in touch with the needs of average Americans, a number that does not bode well for either party's electoral prospects in 2014.

"Democrats have long been considered the party that resonates the most strongly with women. These numbers suggest they've been able to maintain their edge among women despite the general souring toward all DC politicians," said Jenkins.

As for attitudes toward congressional inaction this year, the overwhelming majority of the public (73%) say the limited number of legislative accomplishments is bad for society. About one-in-seven (14%) say less is really more, and around one-in-ten (12%) are unsure. Again, bipartisanship reigns, as does opinion consistency among some important demographic groups: men and women, whites and non-whites, and the young and older. Among all demographic groups considered, those who say congressional inaction is bad for society far outnumber those who say doing little is good.

This is true even among those who feel favorably toward the Tea Party, a movement often defined by its belief in a limited and less active government. Fifty-eight percent of Tea Party supporters say congressional inaction is undesirable as compared with the 29 percent of those who see it is a good thing.

"The public clearly believes Congress is capable of more. Working together to address problems is seen as a necessary ingredient to fulfilling its institutional role in our democracy," said Jenkins.

By a slight margin, congressional Republicans are seen as those most responsible for legislative inaction this year. A third (34%) say the Republicans are to blame, compared with 13 percent for congressional Democrats, 18 percent for the president, and 29 percent who say some combination of the president and Congress share the blame.

Little variation can be seen across demographic categories, with opinion largely divided among those who say congressional Republicans are responsible and those who believe there's plenty of blame to go around. Among those who believe congressional inaction is bad for society, a plurality believe Republicans are responsible (39%). Significantly fewer – 12 percent – point their fingers at congressional Democrats.

"In short, no one fares well. Democrats, Republicans and the president are all looked to for delivering a lackluster year in legislative accomplishments," said Jenkins.

The Fairleigh Dickinson University poll of 1002 individuals aged 18 and older who reside in the United States was conducted by telephone with both landline and cell phones from December 9 through December 15, 2013, and has a margin of error of +/- 3.1 percentage points.

Methodology, questions, and tables on the web at: <http://publicmind.fdu.edu>

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Methodology

The most recent survey by Fairleigh Dickinson University's PublicMind was conducted by telephone from December 9 through December 15, 2013 using a randomly selected sample of 1002 individuals aged 18 and older who reside in the United States. One can be 95 percent confident that the error attributable to sampling has a range of +/- ? percentage points. The margin of error for subgroups is larger and varies by the size of that subgroup. Survey results are also subject to non-sampling error. This kind of error, which cannot be measured, arises from a number of factors including, but not limited to, non-response (eligible individuals refusing to be interviewed), question wording, the order in which questions are asked, and variations among interviewers.

PublicMind interviews are conducted by Opinion America of Cedar Knolls, NJ, with professionally trained interviewers using a CATI (Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing) system. Random selection is achieved by computerized random-digit dialing. This technique gives every person with a landline phone number (including those with unlisted numbers) an equal chance of being selected.

Landline households are supplemented with a separate, randomly selected sample of cell-phone respondents interviewed in the same time frame. The total combined sample is mathematically weighted to match known demographics of age, race and gender.

Tables

Do you approve or disapprove of the way Congress is handling its job?												
		PID			Gender		Race		Age			
	All	Dem	Ind	Rep	Male	Female	White	Nonwhite	18-29	30-44	45-59	60+
Approve	8%	8	7	8	7	8	5	14	10	7	7	7
Disapprove	82%	84	75	84	85	80	86	73	76	82	86	84
DK/Mixed/ Ref (vol)	10%	8	16	8	9	12	9	13	14	11	7	9

Right now, which of the two major parties, Democrats or Republicans, best address the needs of the average American? [Rotate]												
		PID			Gender		Race		Age			
	All	Dem	Ind	Rep	Male	Female	White	Nonwhite	18-29	30-44	45-59	60+
Republicans	29%	8	18	64	30	28	31	25	23	30	29	33
Democrats	35%	72	15	4	28	41	30	50	41	29	35	36
Both/ Neither (vol)	32%	18	59	30	37	27	36	19	31	35	33	27
DK/Ref (vol)	4%	2	8	2	5	4	3	7	5	6	3	3

<i>As you may have heard, Congress is about the close the first year of its session as the least productive ever. In your opinion, is congressional inaction good or bad for our society? [Rotate]</i>												
		PID			Gender		Race		Age			
	All	Dem	Ind	Rep	Male	Female	White	Nonwhite	18-29	30-44	45-59	60+
Good	14%	10	14	19	19	10	14	16	16	17	13	13
Bad	73%	80	69	69	72	74	75	70	69	70	78	75
DK/Mixed/Ref (vol)	12%	10	16	12	10	15	12	14	15	14	9	12

<i>As you may have heard, Congress is about the close the first year of its session as the least productive ever. In your opinion, is congressional inaction good or bad for our society? [Rotate]</i>		
	Views of Tea Party	
	Favorable	Unfavorable
Good	29	7
Bad	58	87
DK/Mixed/Ref (vol)	12	6

<i>In your opinion, who is the most responsible for Congressional inaction? The Republicans in Congress, the Democrats in Congress, or the President? [Rotate]</i>												
		PID			Gender		Race		Age			
	All	Dem	Ind	Rep	Male	Female	White	Nonwhite	18-29	30-44	45-59	60+
Republicans in Congress	34%	63	19	9	32	36	30	43	35	31	35	33
Democrats in Congress	13%	5	6	27	15	10	13	12	12	13	14	12
President	18%	10	18	27	18	18	18	17	17	13	17	23
All equally/Some combo (vol)	29%	17	44	31	29	28	30	22	32	29	27	26
DK/Ref (vol)	8%	4	16	6	7	9	8	6	4	13	8	6

<i>In your opinion, who is the most responsible for Congressional inaction? The Republicans in Congress, the Democrats in Congress, or the President? [Rotate]</i>				
	Views of Tea Party		Congressional inaction good or bad?	
	Favorable	Unfavorable	Good	Bad
Republicans in Congress	14	57	19	39
Democrats in Congress	25	6	21	12
President	27	9	29	15
All equally/Some combo (vol)	30	24	25	29
DK/Ref (vol)	4	4	7	5

<i>Do you approve or disapprove of the way Barack Obama is handling his job as President?</i>												
		PID			Gender		Race		Age			
	All	Dem	Ind	Rep	Male	Female	White	Nonwhite	18-29	30-44	45-59	60+
Approve	34%	66	19	7	30	39	27	55	36	27	39	36
Disapprove	51%	17	57	87	59	44	60	27	44	54	51	54
DK/Mixed/Ref (vol)	15%	17	25	6	12	18	14	19	20	19	9	9

<i>In your opinion, do you believe the country is moving in the right direction or is it on the wrong track?</i>												
		PID			Gender		Race		Age			
	All	Dem	Ind	Rep	Male	Female	White	Nonwhite	18-29	30-44	45-59	60+
Right direction	30%	55	21	7	25	34	23	47	31	24	34	29
Wrong track	58%	26	70	90	64	53	67	35	53	65	56	60
DK/Mixed/Ref (vol)	12%	19	9	4	10	13	10	18	16	10	10	11

Exact Question Wording and Order

US1. *To begin, do you approve or disapprove of the way Barack Obama is handling his job as President?*

- 1 Approve
- 2 Disapprove
- 8 DK/Unsure/mixed [DON'T READ]
- 9 Refused [DON'T READ]

US2. *In your opinion, do you believe the country is moving in the right direction or is it on the wrong track?*

- 1 Right direction
- 2 Wrong track
- 8 DK/Unsure [DON'T READ]
- 9 Refused [DON'T READ]

US3. *Do you approve or disapprove of the way Congress is handling its job?*

- 1 Approve
- 2 Disapprove
- 8 DK/Unsure/mixed [DON'T READ]
- 9 Refused [DON'T READ]

US4 *Right now, which of the two major parties, Democrats or Republicans [rotate], best address the needs of the average American?*

- 1 Republicans
- 2 Democrats
- 3 Both/neither (vol)
- 8 DK/Refused (vol)

US5 *As you may have heard, Congress is about to close the first year of its session as the least productive ever. In your opinion, is congressional inaction good or bad [ROTATE] for our society?*

- 1 Good
- 2 Bad
- 8 DK/Refused (vol)

US5A *In your opinion, who is the most responsible for Congressional inaction?*

- 1 The Republicans in Congress
- 2 The Democrats in Congress
- 3 The President
- 4 All equally (vol)
- 9 DK/Refused (vol)

Sample characteristics

Gender

Male	49
Female	51

Age

18-29	22
30-44	26
45-59	28
60+	24
Refused	2

Race/Ethnicity

White	70
Black/African-American	12
Latino or Hispanic	12
Asian	2
Other/refused	4

Party identification*

Democrat/Lean Democrat	42
Independent/DK/refused	24
Republican/Lean Republican	34

(Party identification question was part of a question order experiment)