THE PUBLIC'S CRITIQUE OF CONGRESS

The 102nd Congress will face the task of reversing the public's vote of "little confidence" registered in the following pages. The number of Americans saying they have a "great deal of confidence" in Congress has dropped from 24 to 15 percent over the past two decades and Congress's ranking relative to other institutions has slipped, too.

Question: I am going to name some institutions in this country. As far as the people running these institutions are concerned, would you say you have a great deal of confidence, only some confidence, or hardly any confidence at all in them?

Congress and other institutions (1990)
A great deal of confidence in...
46% Medicine
37% Scientific community
35% U.S. Supreme Court
33% Military
27% Education
25% Major companies
23% Organized religion
23% Executive branch
18% Banks
15% Congress
15% Press
14% Television
11% Organized labor

Source: Surveys by the National Opinion Research Center, latest that of February-April, 1990.

Question: I am going to read you a list of institutions in American society. Please tell me how much confidence you have in each one—a great deal, quite a lot, some, or very little?

Have a great deal/quite a lot of confidence in...

1973
Church/organized religion
66%
Public schools
58%
U.S. Supreme Court
44%
Congress
42%
Newspapers
39%
Television
37%
Organized labor
30%
Big business 26%

1985
Church/organized religion
66%
Military
61%
U.S. Supreme Court
56%
Banks
51%
Public schools
48%
Congress
39%
Newspapers
35%
Big business
31%
Television
29%
Organized labor
28%

1990
Church/organized religion
56%
Military
47%
U.S. Supreme Court
47%
Public schools
45%
Newspapers
39%
Banks
36%
Organized labor 27%
Big business 25%
Television 25%
Congress 24%

Note: Banks and Military not asked in 1973.
Source: Surveys by the Gallup Organization, latest that of August 16-19, 1990.
Ethical Standards

Most people are dubious about the ethical standards of members of Congress. More than seven in ten Americans think congressmen would lie to protect themselves and that they care more about special interests than about Americans in general. While comparisons of the president to the Congress are tricky, it is evident that the latter's standing is comparatively low.

Question: How would you rate the honesty and ethical standards of people in these different fields—very high, high, average, low, or very low?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rate honesty and ethical standards of... very high/high</th>
<th>1981</th>
<th>1990</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Druggists/pharmacists</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clergy</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical doctors</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dentists</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College teachers</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineers</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policemen</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funeral directors</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bankers</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Television reporters/ commentators/ journalists</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business executives</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper reporters</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senators</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lawyers</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local officeholders</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building contractors</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congressmen</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State officeholders</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Real estate agents</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labor union leaders</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stockbrokers</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insurance salesmen</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertising practitioners</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Car salesmen</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police officers</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question: I am going to read a few statements. For each can you please tell me if you tend to agree or disagree with it, or if, perhaps, you have no opinion about that statement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disagree that ...</th>
<th>Most members of Congress</th>
<th>Agree that ...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Most members of Congress</td>
<td>Will tell lies if they feel the truth will hurt them politically</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Care more about special interests than they care about people like you</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Care more about keeping power than they do about the best interests of the nation</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make a lot of money by using public office improperly</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have a high personal moral code</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Care deeply about the problems of ordinary citizens</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Question: Do you approve or disapprove of the way George Bush is handling his job as president?
Question: Do you approve or disapprove of the way Congress is handling its job?

Approve of the way ... is handling job

George Bush  54%
Congress  26%

Source: Surveys by the Gallup Organization, November 15-18, 1990 (Bush), November 1-4, 1990 (Congress).

Note: 33% of respondents disapprove of the way Bush is handling his job and 63% disapprove of the way Congress is handling its job.
Congress, My Congressman

Americans consistently rate the performance of their own congressmen higher than that of Congress as an institution. Yet the public's discontent with Congress and congressmen alike grew in 1990.

Question: Do you approve or disapprove of the way Congress is handling its job? (Gallup) Do you approve or disapprove of the way your representative in Congress is handling his or her job? (CBS/NYT)


Question: How would you rate the overall performance and accomplishments of this year's Congress—one of the best, above average, below average, or one of the worst?

Would rate overall performance and accomplishments of this year's Congress as ...

One of the best/above average: 8%
Average: 39%
Below average/one of the worst: 51%


Note: * a Registered voters (CBS/NYT) or likely voters (Harris). ABC News/Washington Post. Do you approve or disapprove of the way (Congress)/your representative to the U.S. House in Congress) is (doing) handling his or her job? CBS News/New York Times. Do you approve or disapprove of the way Congress is handling its job? Harris. How would you rate the job (being done by Congress)/your congressman right here in this district—excellent, pretty good, only fair, or poor?
Misgivings about whether one's own representative deserves reelection are clearly visible.

Question: **Do you think the representative in Congress from your district has performed his or her job well enough to deserve reelection, or do you think it's time to give a new person a chance? Regardless of how you feel about your own representative, do you think most members of Congress have done a good enough job to deserve reelection, or do you think it's time to give new people a chance?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Members of Congress</th>
<th>Your congressman</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20% Deserve(s) reelection</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>67% Time for a new person</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: In a NBC News/Wall Street Journal survey conducted October 19-21, 1990, 39% of respondents said their representative deserves reelection; 48% said it is time to give a new person a chance.


Question: **If you could, do you think the American people should fire Congress for the difficulty it has had in passing a deficit reduction plan? Do you think that your representative should be voted out of office for the difficulty Congress has had in passing a deficit reduction plan?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Should be fired/voted out of office for the difficulty Congress has had in passing a deficit reduction plan</th>
<th>Members of Congress</th>
<th>Your representative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Should</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Should not</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Question: **Would you rate the level of ethics and honesty of (members of Congress/your congressman) as ...**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethics and honesty</th>
<th>Members of Congress</th>
<th>Your congressman</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excellent/good</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not so good/poor</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Question: **Now think about all the members of the U.S. House and Senate. How many of them do you think are financially corrupt—most, about half, some, or hardly any? Do you think the representative in Congress from your district is financially corrupt, or not?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Financially corrupt</th>
<th>Members of Congress*</th>
<th>Your representative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Are/is</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are not/is not</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: * Response = "Most" or "About half" = corrupt and "Some" or "Hardly any" = not corrupt.

Public Scrutiny, Divided Government

Ratings of one's own representative may benefit from low public scrutiny—only 10 percent say they follow very closely what their representative does in Congress.

**Question:** How closely do you follow what your own representative to the U.S. House of Representatives does in Congress—very closely, somewhat closely, not too closely, or not at all?

Follow what own representative does in Congress very closely | 10%
---|---
Don't know/no opinion | 78%

**Note:** 31% said "somewhat closely."
**Source:** Survey by ABC News/Washington Post, October 10-14, 1990.

**Question:** Right now are you inclined to vote to reelect your representative in Congress in the next election or are you inclined to look around for someone else to vote for?

Don't know/no opinion | 36%
Inclined to vote to reelect representative | 57%
Inclined to look for someone else | 7%

**Source:** Survey by ABC News/Washington Post, October 19-14, 1990.

**Question:** Which of the following two statements comes closest to the way you feel?

Neither (vol.) 3%
1% Don't know/no opinion
26% We need to keep experienced people in the House and Senate/no time for major changes in Congress
70% We need to elect new people/time for new ideas to solve the country's problems

**Source:** ABC News/Washington Post, September 5-4, 1990.

**Question:** Would you like to see your representative in Congress be reelected in November, or not?

Don't know/no opinion | 31%
Congressman is "not running" (vol.) | 17%
No, not reelected | 27%
Yes, would like to see representative in Congress reelected | 38%

**Source:** Survey by the Gallup Organization for Newsweek, October 11-12, 1990.

**Question:** As you know, the country has a Republican president and a Congress controlled by the Democrats. Do you think it is better or worse for the country to have a president of one party and a Congress controlled by the other party, or doesn't it make a difference?

Not sure 5%
Makes no difference (vol.) | 75%
Worse | 29%
Better for the country to have a president of one party and a Congress controlled by the other party | 50%

**Source:** Survey by Louis Harris and Associates, November 21-22, 1972.

**Question:** Some people say that when a president and a Congress are of opposite political parties it gives balance to our government. Others say that with the problems we face, we need a president and Congress to be of the same political party to enact laws efficiently and quickly. Do you agree or disagree and how strongly, the president and Congress should be of the same party to enact laws efficiently and quickly?

Disagree | 51%
The president and Congress should be of the same party | 37%
No opinion | 12%

**Source:** Survey by Civic Service Inc., February 1-15, 1980.

**Question:** In general, do you think it is better for the same political party to control both the Congress and the presidency, so they can work together more closely, or do you think it is better to have different political parties controlling the Congress and the presidency, to prevent either one from going too far?

Not sure | 5%
Think it is better for the same political party to control both the Congress and the presidency | 67%
Better for different parties to control Congress and the presidency | 23%

**Source:** Survey by Pan-Teener Research Companies for NBC News/Wall Street Journal, October 19-21, 1990.
Term Limits

Dissatisfaction with Congress's performance leads to support for term limits. In California and Colorado, voters affirmed this general sentiment by passing measures limiting the service of state elected officials.

Question: A law has been proposed which would limit a member of the House of Representatives to three terms of four years apiece, or a total of 12 years. Would you favor or oppose such a law?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Favor</th>
<th>Oppose</th>
<th>Don't Know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1969</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Surveys by the Gallup Organization, latest that of April 3-6, 1981.

Question: Should there be...

- Limits on the number of years a member of Congress can serve
  - Voters: 70% favor, 28% no limits

By sex
  - Men: 70% favor, 28% no limits
  - Women: 70% favor, 27% no limits

By race
  - White: 71% favor, 27% no limits
  - Black: 60% favor, 33% no limits
  - Hispanic: 69% favor, 26% no limits

By education
  - Some H.S.: 71% favor, 25% no limits
  - H.S. grad: 73% favor, 24% no limits
  - Some college: 71% favor, 27% no limits
  - College grad: 69% favor, 30% no limits
  - Postgraduate: 65% favor, 33% no limits

By union household
  - 67% favor, 31% no limits

Note: Sample = 9,001 voters as they left voting booths. In a NBC News/Wall Street Journal survey conducted December 8-11, 1990, 74% of respondents favored a limit on the number of terms a senator or member of Congress can serve.

Source: Voter Research and Surveys, November 6, 1990.

Question: How did you vote on the following propositions?

California, Proposition 140 [Passed]
Limit service to 8 years in the State Senate, 6 years in the State Assembly, and limit legislative benefits and spending

| Voters | 54% |

By education

- Some H.S. or H.S. grad: 58%
- Some college: 56%
- College grad: 53%
- Postgraduate: 47%

By party

- Democrat: 43%
- Republican: 63%
- Independent: 58%

Colorado, No. 5 [Passed]
Limit the number of consecutive terms that may be served by state elected officials

| Voters | 69% |

By education

- Some H.S. or H.S. grad: 76%
- Some college: 73%
- College grad: 67%
- Postgraduate: 58%

By party

- Democrat: 63%
- Republican: 73%
- Independent: 70%

Source: Survey by Voter Research and Surveys, November 6, 1990.