THE CRITIQUE OF CONGRESS

The public now views Congress harshly. As a result, it is inclined to endorse sharply worded criticisms—like those below—offered by pollsters.

Question: A number of Congressmen have written checks on their House bank account when they did not have enough money to cover them and they did not have to pay a bounced check charge. Do you think those Congressmen deliberately did this because they knew they could get away with it or do you think they just made a mistake?

Don't know/no answer 4%
Half and half (vol.) 9%
Made a mistake 77%
Congressmen that bounced checks did it because they thought they could get away with it 10%


Question: Some people say it is not a big deal that members of Congress wrote bad checks on their House accounts, because no taxpayer money was involved. Others say it is a big deal because these members of Congress got away with something their constituents could not. Which of these comes closest to your view?

Not a big deal because no taxpayer money was involved 88%
Don't know/refuse 1%
The fact that members of Congress wrote bad checks on their House accounts is a big deal because these members got away with something their constituents could not 11%


Question: Now think about all the members of the U.S. House and Senate. How many of them do you think are financially corrupt?

Think most members of the U.S. House and Senate are financially corrupt 17%
About half 25%
Some 40%
Hardly any 10%
Don't know/no answer 8%


Question: Some people say all special privileges granted to members of Congress should be eliminated to remove any unfairness. Others say those special privileges should not be eliminated because they make public service an affordable option for capable men and women who could make more money in private life. How about you . . .?

All special privileges granted to members of Congress should be eliminated 64%
Should not 29%


Question: Have you heard or read about some members of Congress writing bad checks that were covered for them by the House of Representatives' bank? Do you think this represents business as usual in Congress, or is this an isolated exception to the rule in Congress?

Think some members writing bad checks represents business as usual in Congress
October 1991 55%
March 11, 1992 61%
March 18, 1992 72%


Question: Two years ago, Congress voted to increase members' salaries in exchange for cutting the speaking fees they could accept from special interest groups. Looking back, do you think this Congressional pay raise was a good idea or a bad idea?

Congressional pay raise in exchange for cutting speaking fees from special interest groups was a bad idea
1989* 82%
1992 80%

Note: *Represents respondents who opposed pay raise at the time it was proposed.
Congress, My Congressman

Although ratings of Congress haven’t been high for a long time, they are extremely low today. Fewer than one in five Americans say they approve of the way Congress is doing its job. A solid majority of Americans would deny most members—but not their own representative—re-election.

Question: Do you approve or disapprove of the way Congress is handling its job? How about the representative in Congress from your district? Do you approve or disapprove of the way your representative is handling his or her job?

![Approval of Congress and Representative over time]

Note: Of those who said in the March 1992 survey that they disapprove of the way Congress is handling its job (75%), 76% said they mainly disapprove of both the Democrats and the Republicans in Congress; 13% said mainly the Democrats, and 6% said mainly the Republicans.


Question: Please tell me whether or not you think each of the following political officeholders deserves to be re-elected.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>U.S. representative from your district</th>
<th>Deserves re-election</th>
<th>Does not</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nov. 1991</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan. 3-9, 1992</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan. 31-Feb. 2</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar. 20-22</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

< H.S. grad. 51% 22% 23% 33% 58%
H.S. grad. 59 27 33 56
Some coll. 57 31 35 55
Coll. grad. 53 39 30 62


Question: Now let me read you some statements about November’s congressional elections. For each, tell me if you agree or disagree.

My own member of Congress knows our needs and does a good job of servicing our individual and district needs, so it’s a mistake not to vote him or her back to office this fall

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sep. 1990</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar. 1992</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Question: Do you happen to know the name of the member of Congress who represents this district in the House of Representatives?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>All Adults</th>
<th>Voters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes, know the name of representative in Congress for this district 46% 65%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not know/not sure 54% 35%</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Surveys by the American Enterprise.
Reaching Our Limit?

Americans have long supported term limits for members of Congress, but now the intensity of support for change may be growing. Fifty-five years ago, only 16 percent of respondents complained that "congressmen spend more time thinking of their own political futures than they do in passing legislation"; today 41 percent feel that way.

Question: It has been suggested that no United States senator or representative should serve more than a total of 12 years in office. Do you think this is a good idea or a poor idea?

1952
- No opinion
- Fair or poor idea: 24%
- Think it is a good idea: 63%
- Think it is a good idea that U.S. senators and representatives should serve more than 12 years in office: 13%

1991
- Don't know/refused: 3%
- Oppose: 34%
- Favor limiting U.S. senators and representatives to 12 year terms: 63%

Source: Survey by the Gallup Organization, March 27-April 1, 1952

Source: Survey by the Gallup Organization, October 10-13, 1991

Question: There is a proposal to limit the terms of members of Congress to 12 years. Senators would be limited to two six-year terms. U.S. representatives would be limited to six two-year terms. Would you favor or oppose a 12 year term for members of Congress?

Congress never seems to get anything done, so maybe we ought to replace them all, including my Congressman.

Question: Now I'd like to read you some statements we have heard from other people concerning their vote for Congress this year. After each one, please tell me whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree with that statement.

Source: Survey by American Viewpoint, March 26-April 1, 1992

Question: Which one of these statements best expresses your attitude toward the present U.S. Congress as a whole?

Aug. 1937*
- businessmen spend more time thinking of their own political futures than they do in passing legislation, 16%
- It is about as good a representative body as it is possible for a large nation to have, 44%

Dec. 1990
- Natl. 41%
- <H.S. grad. 34%
- H.S. grad. 42%
- Some coll. 44%
- Coll. grad. 45%

Have a great deal of confidence in the people in charge of running...

1966 61% 1992 50%
- The military
- U.S. Supreme Court 50%
- Medicine 73%
- Major educational institutions 61%
- Television news NA
- The White House NA
- Press 29%
- Executive branch 41%
- Wall Street NA
- Major companies 55%
- Law firms NA
- Congress 42%

Source: Survey by Louis Harris and Associates, February 19-26, 1992

Source: Surveys by the Roper Organization (Roper Reports 91-1), latest that of December 1-8, 1990