

# December 19, 2011

## Anzalone Liszt Research

### National Polling Summary

---

Friends,

Below you will find the weekly Anzalone Liszt Research National Polling Summary, which provides a pollster's take on data and trends that affect political campaigns.

As the year draws to a close, we turn our attention to the legislative branch and its historically low approval ratings. The electoral implications may not yet be clear, but the depth of disillusionment with Congress is.

Following our analysis are additional news items and data we thought you'd enjoy.

John Anzalone and Jeff Liszt

---

#### **STORY THIS WEEK: Congress: Mostly Dead or Slightly Alive?**

##### **How Low Can You Go?**

Republicans used Congress as a tar-baby in 2010, content to have fights with the President that dragged both sides down in hopes of winning back the White House in 2012. The debt ceiling is a good example of this - while [polling](#) clearly showed Republicans taking more blame for gridlock on the issue, and just [20% favored their hard-line "cuts only" approach](#), they took things to the wire and did real damage to the [President's approval](#).

The trade-off, of course, is record-low approval for Congress. In the most recent [CBS/NYT poll](#), just 11% approve and 82% disapprove. That net-disapproval of -71 is the same as in the last [Fox News poll](#) (12% approve / 83% disapprove).

[Gallup's](#) numbers last month were similar (13% approve / 82% disapprove), with low approval for Congress across the political spectrum. Republicans, Democrats, and independents gave Congress an approval rating between 11% and 15%. Gallup's current yearly average of 17% approval is the lowest they have tracked since 1974.

Disapproval is manifesting itself in many of [Gallup's](#) measures, including a record percentage of registered voters who say most members of Congress do not deserve to be re-elected (76%). That's almost 30 points higher than preceding the Republican revolution of 1994. While low

approval ratings for Congress are common and don't necessarily indicate an anti-incumbent wave, the spike in voters saying most members don't deserve re-election could mean trouble. The percentage who say their own member of Congress doesn't deserve re-election is at 39%, similar to where it was for most of 2010 (40%) and 6 points higher than in October 2006.

### **You Look for the Person Who Will Benefit and...Uh...**

The public is dissatisfied with both parties in Congress, but the past year has been tougher on Republicans. They went into election day 2010 with a 9-point advantage on the [generic ballot](#) but now [trail Democrats by 2 points](#). It's too early to draw conclusions from the generic ballot (Republicans didn't start to build a durable advantage in 2010 until the beginning of the summer), but the trendline favors Democrats.

The trendline on partisan job approval also favors Democrats, though only in that their support has eroded less than Republicans' over the last year. Democrats' approval was 5 points higher than Republicans' in the last [NBC/WSJ poll](#) and 8 points higher in a late November [CNN/ORC poll](#). That CNN poll shows Congressional Republicans' approval falling from 31% approve / 66% disapprove in October 2010 (-35) to 21% approve / 77% disapprove in November 2011 (-56). Democrats' numbers have worsened over that time as well, but not by as much (falling from a net of -30 to -37). The trends for Congressional approval are similar in [Pew](#) and [Quinnipiac's](#) polling.

Incumbency is another critical difference between 2012 and 2010. Saying 2010 was an anti-incumbent year not an anti-Democratic year was a distinction without a difference - Democrats held almost all the competitive seats so almost all the vulnerable incumbents were Democrats. The current [Rothenberg report](#) lists 45 competitive seats - 29 Republicans and 16 Democrats. That's a far cry from [October of 2010](#) when they listed 97 competitive Democratic seats and just 9 Republicans.

We still don't have a clear understanding of the number of competitive seats, with maps remaining unsettled in large states like Texas and Florida. Part of the reason Congressional Republicans have felt free to have fights that drag down both sides is that they are counting on their 2010 state legislative gains to protect the House majority through redistricting, while Democrats have 11 more Senate seats on the ballot than Republicans. The main question for Democrats is whether they can build a partisan advantage sufficient to overcome the nationwide map.

### **Naughty or Nice**

One of the more noteworthy areas in which Congress has hit an historic low is ethics. In the most recent [Gallup poll](#), just 7% rate members of Congress's honesty and ethical standards as "very high" or "high." That ties with lobbyists and car salespeople (editor's note: political consultants were not tested). To provide some context, 84% rate nurses "very high" or "high" and high-school teachers are at 62%.

Meanwhile, the percentage who rate Congressional honesty and ethics as "very low" or "low" is 64%. That's 11 points worse than telemarketers (53%) and 27 points worse than lawyers (37%).

While Congress has been consistently upside down on honesty and ethics over the last 25 years, the current record "very low" / "low" rating is 20 points worse than during the House Bank scandal in 1992, and over the last decade Congress has gone from having a "low" rating just 3 points greater than its "high" rating to a difference of 57 points underwater.

The high and low ratings for Congress are the worst recorded. They come amidst reports of ongoing Congressional ethics investigations and reports of Congressional profiteering on stock trades. Heavy news coverage of Congressional scandals is nothing new, but voters may be less likely to chalk things up to bad apples than they were in the past. In 1997, while Newt Gingrich was awaiting punishment for ethical violations, a [CNN poll](#) found that 65% wanted him replaced as Speaker. Yet Gallup's spread between high and low ratings on Congressional ethics was half what it is today.

### **Grade Inflation**

Members themselves aren't much more positive about the job Congress is doing. In a [Hotline poll](#), Democratic members gave the current Congress an average grade of F (including no As and 66% Fs). Republicans were a little more positive, giving this Congress an average grade of C+ (with as many As as Fs and a 39% plurality giving Congress a B).

There was some good news in the Hotline poll: 79% of Democrats and 100% of Republicans said they expected a deal to continue the payroll tax break and extend unemployment benefits. Those measures could have a salutary, if limited, effect on Congressional ratings.

### **OTHER NEWS FROM THE POLLING AND POLITICAL WORLD**

**Gingrich leads Iowa, [but may already be starting to slip](#)**

**Obama leads in [Fox News's Poll](#)**

**And Speaking of Fox News, [they showed](#) T-Paw how you land the Obamney punch**

**[PRRI poll](#) shows Americans more likely to watch "It's a Wonderful Life" (83%) than attend religious services on Christmas Day (66%).**

**A recent [Marist poll](#) shows that "whatever" was named the most annoying word for the third year in a row, outranking favorites such as "like," "you know," and "seriously."**

**Missed a past newsletter?** They can be found on our website, [here](#).

## PUBLIC POLLING

### PRESIDENT OBAMA'S JOB RATING

Polling Firm	Date	Sample	Approve	Disapprove
Ipsos/Reuters	Dec. 8-12	Adults	47%	48%
NBC/Wall Street Journal	Dec. 7-11	Adults	46%	48%
Pew	Dec. 7-11	Adults	46%	43%
CBS	Dec. 5-7	Adults	44%	46%
Fox	Dec. 5-7	Registered Voters	44%	51%
CNN/ORC	Nov. 18-20	Adults	44%	54%

### PARTY SELF ID

Polling Firm	Date	Sample	Dem	Rep	Ind / other
Pollster.com Trend	Dec. 15	Adults	30.8%	24.5%	41.1%

### GOP NATIONWIDE PRIMARY

Polling Firm	Date	Sample
AP-GfK	Dec. 8-12	Republican and Republican-leaning voters
Gingrich	33%	
Romney	27%	
Bachmann	9%	
Paul	9%	
Perry	6%	
Santorum	3%	
Huntsman	2%	

### GOP CAUCUSES AND PRIMARIES

	Iowa	New Hampshire	South Carolina
Polling Firm	<i>Public Policy Polling</i>	<i>Suffolk/7News</i>	<i>NBC News/Marist</i>
Date	<i>Dec. 11-13</i>	<i>Dec. 10-13</i>	<i>Dec. 4-6</i>
Sample	<i>Likely Caucus-goers</i>	<i>Likely Voters</i>	<i>Likely Voters</i>
Gingrich	22%	20%	42%
Romney	12%	38%	23%

Paul	21%	8%	9%
Perry	9%	1%	7%
Bachmann	11%	3%	7%
Santorum	8%	2%	2%
Huntsman	5%	13%	3%

#### DIRECTION OF THE COUNTRY

Polling Firm	Date	Sample	Right Direction	Wrong Track
Ipsos/Reuters	Dec. 8-12	Adults	27%	69%
NBC News/Wall Street Journal	Dec. 7-11	Adults	22%	69%
CBS News	Dec. 5-7	Adults	21%	75%
YouGov/Polimetrix	Dec. 3-6	Adults	16%	73%

#### GENERIC HOUSE BALLOT

Polling Firm	Date	Sample	Dem	Rep	Unsure
Reuters/Ipsos	Dec. 8-12	Registered Voters	48%	42%	7%
Quinnipiac University	Nov. 14-20	Registered Voters	40%	36%	20%

#### OBAMA POPULAR VOTE SHARE

Polling Firm	Date	Polly Vote	Polls	Iowa Electronic Markets	Econometric Models	Index Models
PollyVote	Dec. 15	50.6%	49.1%	49.2%	49.5%	54.4%