

Survey shows Democrats and Republicans agree on Congress: Members pay attention to wrong groups when voting

CHICAGO, Feb. 26, 2018 — Democrats and Republicans disapprove of Congress because members are paying attention to the wrong people and groups when casting votes, according to a recently released survey conducted by researchers from Stanford University, in collaboration with [The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research](#), and the University of California, Santa Barbara.

Many Americans, regardless of political party, want lawmakers to vote on an issue by paying most attention to the preferences of the entire American public and those of their constituents. Few Americans want lawmakers to pay a lot of attention to elites, donors, political party leaders, or the president.

Americans do not believe that members of Congress are taking into enough account the opinions of the public, instead voting based on the preferences of campaign donors, wealthy Americans, and lobbyists.

“These results illustrate striking agreement between Republicans and Democrats about how they want government leaders to make decisions and how they believe government has gone off the rails,” said Jon Krosnick, professor of communication, political science, and psychology at Stanford University and co-director of the study.

Americans agree that Congress has paid little attention to the president when making decisions, both under President Donald Trump and former President Barack Obama, and approve.

“We have known for some time that the public is not happy with Congress, and we wanted to explore why, going beyond generic explanations such as, ‘they are not getting anything done,’ said [Trevor Thompson](#), director of The AP-NORC Center. “Large majorities in both parties report lawmakers should pay attention to the majority of Americans but believe lawmakers actually pay attention to donors and elites. Rare in 2018, both self-identified Republicans and Democrats agree.”

	Percent who say representatives...	
	Should pay attention to	Actually pay attention to
The public		
Majority of those in state/district	68%	20%
Majority of those in the United States	65%	18%
Best interests of those in the United States	62%	20%
Elites and donors		
Majority of people who gave money to their last campaign	14%	60%
Majority of wealthy people in the United States	12%	58%
Lobbying organizations that gave money to last election campaign	11%	66%

Source: AP-NORC Democratic Representation Poll conducted September 17-October 19, 2015, with 1,021 adults nationwide.

Key findings include:

- More than 6 in 10 Americans said members of Congress should pay a lot of attention to their constituents and the general public, while only 1 in 10 said they should pay a lot of attention to donors and lobbyists.
- However, 6 in 10 adults reported that representatives pay a lot of attention to people who donate money to their campaign, while only 2 in 10 believed that representatives pay such attention to the majority of Americans.
- Fifty-eight percent of Americans said members of Congress pay a lot of attention to party leaders, but only 18 percent said representatives should pay such attention to party leaders.
- The third of Americans most dissatisfied with the congressional decision-making process are more likely to disapprove of Congress (93 percent) than the third of Americans who are less dissatisfied with the process (72 percent).

About the Survey

This study was designed by researchers in the Political Psychology Research Group at Stanford University and at the University of California, Santa Barbara. The research was completed through a collaboration of The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research, Stanford University, and the University of California, Santa Barbara. The data were collected by NORC at the University of Chicago using AmeriSpeak®, which is a probability-based panel designed to be representative of the U.S. household population. During the initial recruitment phase of the panel, randomly selected U.S. households are sampled with a known, non-zero probability of selection from the NORC National Sample Frame, and then contacted by U.S. mail, email, telephone, and field interviewers (face-to-face). The panel provides sample coverage of approximately 97 percent of the U.S. household population. Those excluded from the sample include people with P.O. Box only addresses, some addresses not listed in the USPS Delivery Sequence File, and some newly constructed dwellings.

The project was funded by the Woods Institute for the Environment at Stanford University and by NORC.

Interviews for this survey were conducted online from September 17 to October 19, 2015, with adults age 18 and over from the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Panel members were randomly drawn from AmeriSpeak, and 1,021 completed the survey online. Interviews were conducted in English. The overall margin of sampling error is +/- 3.95 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level, including the design effect. The margin of sampling error may be higher for subgroups.

A second survey to replicate the results was conducted online from August 29 to September 8, 2017, with adults age 18 and over from the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Panel members who elected to take surveys online were randomly drawn from AmeriSpeak, and 355 completed the survey. Interviews were conducted in English. Panelists who completed the 2016 survey were excluded from sampling. The overall margin of sampling error is +/- 7.03 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level, including the design effect. The margin of sampling error may be higher for subgroups.

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The two organizations have established The AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research to conduct, analyze, and distribute social science research in the public interest on newsworthy topics, and to use the power of journalism to tell the stories that research reveals.

About the Political Psychology Research Group at Stanford University

The Political Psychology Research Group (PPRG) at Stanford University is a cross-disciplinary team of scholars who conduct empirical studies of the psychology of political behavior and studies seeking to optimize research methodology for studying political psychology. PPRG's studies employ a wide range of research methods, including surveys, experiments, and content analysis, and the group often conducts collaborative research studies with leading news media organizations, including ABC News, The AP, the *Washington Post*, and *Time Magazine*. Support for the group's work has come from U.S. government agencies (e.g., National Science Foundation, Bureau of Labor Statistics), private foundations (e.g., Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation), and institutes at Stanford (e.g., Woods Institute for the Environment). The PPRG also hosts the Summer Institute in Political Psychology, that includes up to 60 international participants.

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