

Lame-Duck Was Popular – But Will it Quack Again?

Americans overwhelmingly welcome the flurry of lawmaking between Congress and President Obama last month – but they're hedging their bets on whether the duck keeps quacking.

Seventy-seven percent in this ABC News/Yahoo! News poll say it was good for Obama and Congress to agree to lame-duck legislation on tax cuts, unemployment benefits, gays in the military, the START treaty and aid to 9/11 responders. That includes majorities across the spectrum – 91 percent of Democrats, 79 percent of independents and 62 percent of Republicans.

Whether it lasts is another matter: Whatever the lame-duck session achieved, Americans divide evenly on the chances Obama and the Republicans in Congress will work together on important issues in the year ahead. Forty-eight percent are optimistic about it – just 14 percent “strongly” so – but about as many, 46 percent, are pessimistic about the prospects for political cooperation.

Optimism peaks among Democrats; 60 percent see cooperation ahead. That drops to 46 percent of independents and four in 10 Republicans in this poll, produced for ABC and Yahoo! News by [Langer Research Associates](#). The survey was conducted before the shooting of Rep. Gabrielle Giffords and 18 others in Tucson, Ariz.; further polling will indicate whether that event and its aftermath impact public views of the prospects for political cooperation.

OBAMA – The survey also marks the extent to which a president – even when hammered in the midterms, as was Obama this fall – commands the political stage. People who call the lame-duck legislation a good thing say by 2-1, 62-31 percent, that Obama, not the Republicans in Congress, deserves more of the credit. On the other hand those who see it as a bad thing say by an almost identical margin, 61-29 percent, that Obama deserves more of the blame.

Naturally, there's partisanship here; Democrats credit Obama rather than the Republicans in Congress for the legislation by 81-14 percent; Republicans, conversely, credit their party's leaders, albeit by a somewhat tighter 68-23 percent. But in the crucial center, twice as many independents credit Obama as the Republicans in Congress, by 60 percent to 32 percent.

What also works for Obama is that so many more say the lawmaking was a good thing. That's not an unexpected result, given the public's position on some of those laws. The tax-and-benefits bill won 69 percent support in an ABC News/Washington Post poll in mid-December, 77 percent in that same survey favored allowing gays to serve openly in the military, and 70 percent in an NBC News poll favored approval of the START treaty.

ECONOMIC LOOKAHEAD – While the potential for future cooperation gets a split decision, so does the public's outlook on the economy: Forty-seven percent are optimistic about its

prospects in the year ahead, but 50 percent are pessimistic. Worse, more than twice as many are “strongly” pessimistic than strongly optimistic about the economy in 2011.

Economic optimism for the year ahead, moreover, is down by 8 points from its level in an ABC/Post poll back in April 2009, when the recession was still in full swing. More, though – 65 percent – feel optimistic about their own family’s financial situation, and that’s held essentially steady since late 2008, despite the economic upheaval that’s occurred.

These views work together; people who feel optimistic about Obama and the Congress working together also are more optimistic about the economy and their own finances, and vice versa.

GROUPS – Americans’ expectations for their own family’s financial situation are divided chiefly by wealth (and a closely related metric, education) rather than partisanship. Optimism about personal finances ranges from 88 percent among people with household incomes of more than \$100,000 a year to 58 percent of those earning less than \$50,000. Likewise it’s 78 percent among college graduates vs. 58 percent of those without a high school diploma.

By contrast about seven in 10 Republicans and Democrats alike are optimistic about their own finances.

On the other hand, views are sharply partisan in terms of expectations for the economy more broadly: Fifty-nine percent of Democrats are optimistic, but just 39 percent of Republicans agree. And on this independents, at 43 percent, line up with the glummer GOP viewpoint.

Finally, and interestingly, economic optimism is down only among Democrats (by 11 points) and independents (by 9 points); it’s unchanged among Republicans, who may have found the November election results a bit of an antidote to the blues.

And while it’s down overall, optimism about the economy actually is up among Americans with incomes more than \$100,000; 46 percent in this group were optimistic in April 2009, vs. 57 percent now. A rising stock market and extension of the Bush-era tax cuts can’t have hurt.

METHODOLOGY – This ABC News/Yahoo News! poll was conducted Dec. 29, 2010-Jan. 5, 2011, among a random national sample of 1,015 adults. Respondents were selected using an address-based sample design. Households for which a phone number could be ascertained were contacted by phone; others were contacted by mail and asked to complete the survey via a toll-free inbound phone number or the internet. See details [here](#). Results for the full sample have a 4-point error margin. Click [here](#) for a detailed description of sampling error.

This survey was produced by [Langer Research Associates](#) of New York, N.Y, with sampling, data collection and tabulation by SSRS of Media, Pa.

Analysis by Gary Langer.

ABC News polls can be found at ABCNEWS.com at <http://abcnews.com/pollingunit>

Media contact: Natalia Labenskyj, (212) 456-4369.

Full results follow (*= less than 0.5 percent).

1. Thinking about the next 12 months, would you say you feel (optimistic) or (pessimistic) about [ITEM]? Is that strongly optimistic/pessimistic, or somewhat?

1/5/11 - Summary Table

	----Optimistic----			---Pessimistic----			No op.
	NET	Strgly	Smwht	NET	Smwht	Strgly	
a. The chances that President Obama and the Republicans in Congress will work together on important issues	48	14	34	46	27	19	6
b. The state of the national economy	47	10	36	50	27	23	4
c. Your own family's financial situation	65	25	40	31	20	11	4

Trend:

a. No trend.

b. the state of the national economy

	-----Optimistic-----			-----Pessimistic-----			No opinion
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	
1/5/11	47	10	36	50	27	23	4
4/24/09*	55	NA	NA	42	NA	NA	3
2/22/09	48			50			2
12/14/08	48			50			3
9/29/08 RV	43			53			4
4/13/08	40			58			2
2/1/08	45			51			4
12/9/07	45			52			3
12/11/06	64			33			3
5/15/06	52			46			1
12/18/05	55			44			1
9/11/05	51			46			2
6/5/05	59			40			1
12/19/04	58			40			2
6/20/04	64			34			2
1/18/04	63	"	"	35	"	"	2

*4/09 and previous, ABC News/Washington Post

c. your own family's financial situation

	-----Optimistic-----			-----Pessimistic-----			No opinion
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	
1/5/11	65	25	40	31	20	11	4
4/24/09*	66	NA	NA	31	NA	NA	3
2/22/09	66			31			3
12/14/08	68			29			2
9/29/08 RV	61			34			5
4/13/08	66			31			3
2/1/08	67			30			3
12/9/07	72			25			3
12/11/06	82			16			2
5/15/06	79			20			1
12/18/05	73			26			1
12/19/04	75	"	"	23	"	"	2

*4/09 and previous, ABC News/Washington Post

2. (Congress) and (Obama) agreed recently on issues including tax cuts, unemployment benefits, gays in the military, a nuclear arms treaty and aid to 9/11 responders. Regardless of your position on any of these issues individually, overall do you think it's a good thing or a bad thing that (Congress) and (Obama) reached these agreements? Do you feel that way strongly or somewhat?

	-----Good thing-----			-----Bad thing-----			No
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	opinion
1/5/11	77	36	41	17	9	9	5

3a. (IF GOOD THING) Who do you think deserves more of the credit for these agreements - (Obama) or (the Republicans in Congress)?

	Obama	Republicans	Neither (vol.)	Other (vol.)	Both (vol.)	No opin.
1/5/11	62	31	2	*	3	3

3b. (IF BAD THING) Who do you think deserves more of the blame for these agreements - (Obama) or (the Republicans in Congress)?

	Obama	Republicans	Neither (vol.)	Other (vol.)	Both (vol.)	No opin.
1/5/11	61	29	2	1	5	3

END