



Congressional Institute Reform Study



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Overview

It is widely known that the American electorate disapproves of Congress and the level of partisanship that is taking place in the public policy environment, but there are deeper reasons behind the disapproval and dissatisfaction in the national voter outlook. There is significant concern about the future for the next generation and frustration over partisanship, but going beyond partisanship alone, there is also a concern about a lack of accountability in Congress and a perception that Congress is not truly acting in the best interest of the people. Compounding this problem, the media is viewed as a source of promoting conflict in Congress, with many voters acknowledging that there may be good things happening in Congress but the media does not report on it nor is the media incentivized to report on positive events. As a result, the electorate is not fully clear on what is truly happening in the legislative process. Given these elements, the majority of the electorate - including voters of all partisan affiliation - feels that their voices are not heard effectively in the current policy discourse.

In recent research commissioned by the Congressional Institute, we looked at approval of Congress and individual Members of Congress, but also reasons behind approval and disapproval. While disapproval is largely motivated by perceptions of general ineffectiveness, Republicans tend to feel the ineffectiveness comes from lack of accountability and lawmakers not acting in the best interest of the people, while Democrats' perception of ineffectiveness is that Congress blocks the President's authority for partisan reasons in addition to not being accountable. This difference in perspective about the reasons for Congressional ineffectiveness also impacts views about the present constitutional balance of power, with Democrats feeling that power has shifted too much toward the legislative branch, blocking the President's agenda. Republicans believe the opposite - that power has shifted too much toward the executive branch. This difference is more of a reflection of which party currently holds the executive branch than simple partisan disagreement.

These elements provide a natural construct for an effort to begin reforming Congress and introducing proposals that would have a direct impact on increasing the level of accountability in Congress, also providing voters with greater clarity into the legislative process. Of a set of potential reform proposals, the stronger performing proposals related to increased transparency about voting records and increased oversight of budget and regulatory issues. While there were some variations by party and ideology, there was general consensus across party about the proposals that would have the most positive effect on Congressional accountability, presenting an opportunity to build bipartisan consensus around certain proposals.

While reaction to the overall set of proposals was that many of them should already be happening, the general outlook from voters was that the set of proposals would be a good first step to refocusing Congress on its basic responsibilities in addition to increasing accountability, understanding of the legislative process, and helping voters' voices to be heard.

Views About Congress

Congressional Job Approval

Views about Congress and Members have declined since the 2006 study for the Congressional Institute. Congressional job approval now stands at 12-83 approve-disapprove (compared to 27-66 in 2006). Disapproval of Congress is very high across voters of all partisan affiliation, but with some variations in reasons behind the disapproval.

Among the small percentage of voters who approve, reasons tend to include trying to steer the country in the right direction (72%) and keeping the President in check (8%), with a slightly higher percentage of Republicans than Democrats in this group of voters. (See Appendix, Table 1 for categorized reasons for approval).



Below are a few verbatim responses from those who approve of Congress, explaining their reasons for approval:

Congress is doing the best they can with what they have, but it can be improved.

They are doing what they can with the gridlock within the executive branch and Congress.

Congress is doing a good job running the country. They are putting pressures on the right spot in areas such as national defense, working to decrease spending, and working to fix health care.

They are doing the best they can while their hands are pretty much tied to make the changes they need because of red tape.

Reasons for Disapproval

Among those who disapprove of Congress, reasons are general ineffectiveness (44%), obstructionism (27%) and not being for the people (22%). However there are some variations by party in reasons for the perceived ineffectiveness. For Republicans, disapproval tends to be based on “ineffective/not doing anything” (43%), but in the context of self-interest and not acting for the best interest of the people (25%). For Democrats, disapproval tends to be driven by “ineffective/not doing anything” (42%) but tied to obstructionism and opposing the President (37%). (See Appendix, Table 2 for categorized reasons for disapproval).

Below are a few verbatim responses from voters who disapprove of Congress to reflect reasons for their disapproval.

They no longer represent the will of the people. They are not doing what the people are telling them to do.

I don't think they have the people's interests heard. I wish they would work together for the common good.

Nothing is being done to bring forward any jobs or plans for this country.

Politicians are only out for their personal gain. Those parties are not really concerned about the people. They are not concerned about their constituents and the voters.

They are not in touch with the people. They do not know how hard the Americans live.

They lost the ability to compromise which is essential since we are in a democratic government. Everybody wants to get everything they want without giving something in return.

Outlook on the Next Generation

Disapproval of Congress is being further compounded by concerns about the direction of the country and the future for the next generation. The direction of the country continues to be very negative (26-67 right direction - wrong track), with particularly negative outlook among Republicans (9-89), conservative Republicans (10-88), and tea party voters (4-93).

The sustained negative outlook about the direction of the country is connected to concern about the future for the next generation and their quality of life. About six in ten (61%) voters believes the statement that *the next generation will not have the same quality of life as you had* (61-37 believe-



do not believe), with that concern being even more prevalent among conservative Republicans (73-26) and tea party voters (78-20).

This concern is shared by age, with younger voters (61-36) sharing the concern with older voters (56-41). Additionally, women are more inclined to believe this statement (65-32 believe-do not believe) than men (56-41). Married women with children are especially inclined to believe this statement (71-28).

Do you believe or not believe this statement: the next generation will not have the same quality of life as you had.

	Overall	18-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
Believe	61	61	66	61	60	56
Do not believe	37	36	33	37	37	41

Given the seriousness of concerns about the country and the next generation, and expectations of Congress to address those concerns, this outlook is impacting how voters may evaluate individual Members and their expectations of Members.

Job Approval of Your Member of Congress

For individual Members, there has been a similar decline in job approval of your Member of Congress since the 2006 work of the Institute, going from 58-33 in 2006 to 39-43 presently. In contrast to overall Congressional approval, Member job approval tends to vary more by party, with disapproval being milder than disapproval of Congress, and Democrats tending to approve of their Member (44-37) more than Republicans (41-45).

Job Approval of Your Member of Congress

	2006 Overall	Overall	Tea Party	Cons Rep	Rep	Ind	Dem
Approve	58	39	36	40	41	32	44
Disapprove	33	43	54	47	45	47	37

Reasons Behind Member Job Approval

In terms of reasons for approval of their Member, approval tends to be grounded in general positive feeling of doing a good job for the country/doing the right thing (40%), agreeing with the Member's policies and ideas (16%), and the sense that the Member represents the people (14%).

For Republicans, their approval is based on the perception that the Member is doing a good job (38%), agreeing with the Member's policies (21%), sense that the Member is representing the people (12%) and helping the economy (10%). For Democrats, their approval tends to be largely based on general positive feelings about the Member of Congress (44%) and the feeling that the Member is representing the people (15%), with slightly less emphasis on agreement with the Member's policies (14%) than Republicans have (21%). (See Appendix, Table 3 for categorized reasons for approval).

The following verbatim responses reflect reasons as to why some voters approve of their Member of Congress:

That is because they are working for the people, and not just for the party.

He seems to be for the people.

We have seen that even though the Congress' hands were somewhat tied in the last several years, she has actually done things to make the economy better.

I have seen the Member of Congress on the news. There is information that he is working and trying to come up with solutions to problems. He is actually trying to get something done in Congress. He is trying to find solutions to our problems.

My Congressman is doing everything he can to get what I need.

It is because they are fighting for the issues I believe in.

My representative is less partisan than others and looking out for our country as a whole.

It is because it seems like they are trying to do what is best for the people.

My Congressman's efforts are consistent with my outlook. He is doing things that are positive for the economy, immigration, health care and jobs.

Reasons for Disapproval of Members of Congress

For those who disapprove of their Member, Republicans and conservative Republicans tend to disapprove for several reasons, more than the reasons for which Democrats disapprove. Republicans tend to disapprove because things are headed in the wrong direction and the Member is seen as not doing a good job (42%), followed by self-interest/not for the people (23%), disagreeing with their views (21%) and concerns about the budget and spending (11%). Additionally, given that Republicans expect the Republican Congress to stop the President's agenda, their expectations are likely to be higher than those of Democrat voters. For Democrats, disapproval is driven mostly by the belief that the country is headed in the wrong direction (46%) and obstructionism (19%), again reflecting their belief that Congress is blocking the President's authority for partisan reasons. (See Appendix, Table 4 for categorized reasons for disapproval).

Survey verbatim responses about why voters disapprove of their Member include the following statements:

They are putting themselves above the people they are supposed to be representing.

They are out of touch with reality. They do not understand what the average American goes through.

We don't know how Congress works, because we don't know what they are doing.

Their interests are not the same. They have some kind of hidden agenda.

There is too much politics, and they are too inclined in thinking what is good for them and for their political party, and not for the people of the country.

If that representative is not actively looking to break down the division and build bridges, that representative should not be there.

Concerns about Congress



In the 2006 study for the Congressional Institute, we found that partisanship was viewed as the result of the inability of the modern Congress to work together - reflecting a lack of will to get things done - more than the role of the media and the ideological differences throughout the country. This view still holds true at a broad level, but with some slight change among Republicans.

Historical Trending about Partisanship in Congress

While there is a consensus across party that partisanship in Congress is due to the inability of the modern Congress to work together, over the past decade there has been some increase in the percentage of conservative Republicans and Republicans who view this as a result of ideological differences throughout the country (going from 22% to 28%), while there has been almost no change in the views of independents and Democrats who see this problem as the result of lack of will to work together.

Do you think that partisanship in Congress is due to...		Overall	Cons GOP	GOP	Ind	Dem
A reflection of the ideological differences throughout the country	JAN 2006	24	22	22	23	25
	APR 2016	24	28	28	18	24
The inability of the modern Congress to work together	JAN 2006	49	42	39	52	57
	APR 2016	53	40	45	56	59

Media coverage	JAN 2006	21	30	32	18	13
	APR 2016	17	27	22	17	13

Concerns about Lack of Accountability

While the perceptions of those three reasons remains largely consistent, the number and scope of concerns has expanded and become much more complex since a decade ago. Reflecting what we heard in the qualitative research, while there are many concerns about Congress, lack of accountability is one of the most serious concerns (7.58 on a scale of 1-9, with 9 being extremely concerning to you).

Below are two quotes from the qualitative research about accountability:

Republican: [Members of Congress] are accountable to their party and not to the people.

Independent: They are not being held accountable. Elections aren't holding them accountable, because they keep re-voting the same [Members] back in and back in and back in. And they keep doing the same mistakes over and over and over, and nobody says, why do we keep shutting the government down every other month?

Among voters overall, *lack of accountability* (7.58) ranked slightly higher than *the way Congress spends my money* (7.54) and even more than *influence of special interests* (7.12). Another significant concern is *not presenting a clear plan to voters and following through* (7.36), which was also heard in the qualitative discussions. *Your voice not being heard* (7.26) and *not fulfilling its Constitutional role* (7.23) were also very important.

Concerns about Congress (on a scale of 1-9 with 1 being it does not concern you at all, 5 neutral and 9 being extremely concerning to you)	
	Overall
Lack of accountability	7.58
The way Congress spends my money	7.54
Not presenting a clear plan to voters and following through	7.36
Your voice not being heard	7.26
Not fulfilling its Constitutional role	7.23
Influence of special interests	7.12
Partisanship	6.71
Gerrymandering of Congressional districts	6.34

There are some variations of concerns by party (See Appendix, Table 5 for a chart demonstrating these variations):

- Not surprisingly, conservative Republicans (8.09), Republicans (7.96) and tea party voters (8.36) are most troubled by the way Congress spends money, but this concern is followed very closely by lack of accountability which they may also connect to spending problems. For conservative Republicans, as concerned as they are about the Constitutional balance of power, the concern about not presenting a clear plan to voters and following through (7.49) is on par with not fulfilling its Constitutional role (7.49).
- For independents, lack of accountability (7.39) and spending (7.36) are their top concerns.
- For Democrats, not fulfilling its Constitutional role (7.52) is their top concern, on par with lack of accountability (7.51), but from the Democratic perspective, Congress is not fulfilling the Constitutional role by opposing the President's agenda.
- Note that gerrymandering is more concerning to Democrats (6.70) than Republicans (6.00).

Understanding of the Legislative Process

Reflecting what we heard in the qualitative research, voters tend to feel that they have some understanding of what is happening in Washington, but are not fully clear on how the process works. This confusion and lack of certainty about what is truly happening in the legislative process is exacerbated by the belief that the media is holding back on reporting on good things that are happening in Congress and only reporting the conflicts to keep up ratings. While the majority of the electorate says that they understand the legislative process well to some extent (78% well), the largest percentage (55%) feels that they understand the process only “*somewhat well.*”

Independent: We really don't know what's going on up there. And I'm sure they've passed legislation. I just don't think we've heard about it.

By party, conservative Republicans (30%) and tea party voters (39%) are slightly more inclined to say they understand the process very well than other groups such as Democrats (only 18% very well).

Because of the lack of certainty of what is happening in the legislative process and distrust of the media's reporting on Congress, this leads to concerns about Congress not presenting a clear plan to voters and following through.

Role of the Media

Consistent with the findings of the focus groups, the media is not viewed as playing a positive role in the current policy discourse, with a clear recognition from voters that the media is incentivized to *make people frustrated about what is not getting done in Washington* (81%) rather than *making people happy about what is getting done in Washington* (15%). This cuts across party, with both Republicans (84-14) and Democrats (77-18) sharing the belief that the media promotes conflict in Congress.

Independent: Media is going to make more money by making me frustrated about what Congress is not passing instead of making me happy about what Congress should pass.

Moderator: How does it make them money?

Independent: It gets more eyes, more views, more clicks...

Independent: I don't think that We the People hold them accountable, because we listen to media reports. Therefore, we hear the extremes. And never the person who's slow and steady and making progress.



As a result of this outlook toward the media, there is also a strong preference for more coverage of issues and policy discussions in Congress (89%) rather than personalities in Congress (7%). This also cuts across party and ideology.

What statement do you agree with more?						
	Overall	Tea Party	Cons Rep	Rep	Ind	Dem
I would like to see the media report more on the issues and actual policy discussions in Congress	89	87	85	88	92	89
I would like to see the media report on the personalities in Congress	7	5	6	6	5	9

Is Your Voice Heard?

Consistent with other research we have seen in recent years, less than 1 in 5 (19%) voters believes that their voice is heard effectively (19-79 yes-no).

In thinking about the role of people like you in the political and public policy discourse about issues, do you think your voice is heard effectively?						
	Overall	Tea Party	Cons Rep	Rep	Ind	Dem
Yes	19	8	12	15	18	23
No	79	90	87	84	80	74

- By party, Republicans (15%) and conservative Republicans (12%) are even less inclined to feel their voices are heard than Democrats (23%), which may reflect Democrats holding the White House “bully pulpit” at the moment.
- Among those who consider themselves part of the tea party movement, only 8% feel their voices are heard.

While townhall and social media engagement with constituents is very important, it does not seem to show much improvement in whether voters feel their voices are heard.

- Among those who say they have attended a townhall or tele-townhall, only 17% feel their voices are heard (17-82); among those that have not participated in a townhall, that figure is largely unchanged at 20-78.
- Among those who follow their Member of Congress on social media, 17% feel their voices are heard (17-82); among those who do not, there is almost no difference (20-78).

Voter Engagement

In this survey, we included a few questions about the ways in which voters engage with Members of Congress. The survey found that 13% of the electorate has engaged with Members in at least two ways: following their Member of Congress on social media and having participated in a town hall or tele-townhall. About half the electorate (51%) has not done either.

About one in three (33%) says that they follow their Member of Congress on social media (33-67 yes-no), with slightly higher percentages among the party bases. In terms of those who have attended a town hall or participated in a tele-townhall, almost one in three (29%) says that they have participated, with slightly higher percentages among conservative Republicans (36%).

Constituent Engagement with Members - By Party					
	Overall	Cons Rep	Rep	Ind	Dem
Follow your Member of Congress on social media	33	37	36	29	34
Have Attended a Town Hall/Tele-Townhall	29	36	31	30	26

Across age, older voters are more inclined to follow their Member on social media (41% among 45-54; 38% among age 55-64; 35% among 65+) than the 18-34 age group (24%), which is presently the age category with the lowest percentage following Members. Similar to the trend with social media, town hall participation is lowest among younger voters (19-31), and slightly higher among the older voting population (35-65).

Constituent Engagement with Members - By Age						
	Overall	18-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
Follow your Member of Congress on social media	33	24	31	41	38	35
Have Attended a Town Hall/Tele-Townhall	29	19	25	36	31	35

Among those who follow their Member on social media, nearly half (46%) have also attended a town hall or tele-townhall.

Sources of Information about Member Votes and Positions

For those seeking out information about Member votes and positions, they are more likely to turn to media resources and official Member resources, more than social media, as illustrated by the chart below.

By party, Democrats are more likely to rely on media sources (37% TV, 37% newspapers, 37% news websites) for information on votes and positions, while for Republicans and conservative Republicans, they may also look to those media resources but with a higher percentage looking to the official site of the Member (35% among conservative Republican, 30% among Republicans) than among Democrats (22%). This may reflect Republicans' lower level of trust in the media as a credible source of information.

To which of the following sources would you be most likely to turn to find out how your Member of Congress voted or positions they have taken? (More than one answer allowed)

	Overall	Cons Rep	Rep	Ind	Dem
News websites	38	34	34	45	37
Newspapers	37	35	40	36	37
Television	31	28	29	26	37
Official websites of the Member of Congress	28	35	30	32	22
Facebook	14	19	18	14	12
Twitter	7	6	5	7	9

However by age, younger voters would turn largely to news websites (58%) far more than official Member sites (28%), with older voters looking toward traditional media sources like newspapers (51%) and television (42%).

To which of the following sources would you be most likely to turn to find out how your Member of Congress voted or positions they have taken? (More than one answer allowed)

	Overall	18-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
News websites	38	58	35	30	38	25
Newspapers	37	31	29	36	43	51
Television	31	19	28	36	33	42
Official websites of the Member of Congress	28	28	27	34	25	25
Facebook	14	17	20	12	16	5
Twitter	7	10	5	9	7	4

Constitutional Balance of Power

Perceptions of the current constitutional balance of power are largely driven which party holds the executive branch, with Republicans seeing the balance as having shifted too much toward the executive branch (72% shifted too much toward the President, 16% too much toward Congress), and Democrats seeing the balance as having shifted too much toward Congress (62%) rather than to the President (11%).



Independents tend to be evenly split between too much power toward the President (39%) and too much toward Congress (38%).

Which of the following statements best describes the current Constitutional balance of power?

	Overall	Tea Party	Cons Rep	Rep	Ind	Dem
It is just as the Founders intended it to be	15	1	4	7	20	19
It has shifted too much toward the President	40	89	76	72	39	11
It has shifted too much toward Congress	39	9	13	16	38	62

For Democrats, discussions about constitutional power are going to be from the perspective that Congress is obstructing the President's authority, while for Republicans, their views about constitutional power will be from the perspective that Congress has been undermined and the President's power is left unchecked.

Below are statements from the focus groups that demonstrate the differences in perceptions about balance of power:

Independent: I think the Executive Branch prepares to have more power right now, because it's the only thing that's accomplishing anything. The Legislature can't get [anything] done, because they are just fighting.

Republican: Basically I think the process is broken. President Obama has passed several laws that totally bypass Congress, and I think there are some loopholes there that need to be plugged.

Republican: I think for too long that we have allowed this to happen in Congress where they are not talking to each other, they are not talking to the President. President doesn't want to hear them. I can just veto anything that comes down the road.

Congressional Authorization of Federal Programs and Agencies

Reflecting the qualitative work, there was some basic belief that federal programs and agencies should be authorized by Congressional review (40%), rather than continuing to fund those programs without Congressional approval (53%). While this view is being driven largely by Republicans (60-32), Democrats are almost evenly split on this contrast (50-45).

Views About Reform

In the survey, we asked voters to rank a series of potential Congressional reform proposals on a scale of 1-9 with 1 being that it would not help at all, 5 neutral and 9 extremely helpful to increase the level of accountability in Congress. Individual reform proposals were generally well received with most ranking in the 6-7 range, indicating that they would be moderately helpful to improving accountability in Congress.

On a scale of 1-9, with 1 being not at all helpful, 5 neutral and 9 extremely helpful, how much would each of the following proposals help to increase the level of accountability in Congress?						
	Overall	Tea Party	Cons GOP	GOP	Ind	Dem
Members of Congress should be required to publish their voting records on taxpayer funded official websites	7.59	8.24	7.75	7.64	7.63	7.55
Make Congress pass bills to fund government departments separately so that the public can better understand what is in them and the decisions being made	7.46	8.01	7.70	7.65	7.46	7.28
Make Congress pass a budget every two years	7.09	7.69	7.42	7.21	6.95	7.09
Require Congressional approval of funding for significant new regulations approved by the President before they can go into effect	6.82	7.69	7.67	7.47	6.72	6.31
Create a formal and disciplined process through establishing a joint bipartisan committee for considering reforms	6.71	6.97	6.39	6.55	6.92	6.71
Make it harder for Senators to filibuster must-pass budget and appropriations bills	6.59	5.80	5.94	6.18	6.31	7.19

Increase Congressional oversight over federal programs and agencies to produce more scrutiny over what programs are suppose to accomplish	6.52	7.43	6.94	6.96	6.50	6.12
Subject the appropriations process to more oversight and more amendments to cut or increase spending	6.34	6.68	6.45	6.42	6.28	6.31
Give the committees more authority to write legislation and enable members for the committees to contribute more to the process, increasing debate, allowing amendments regardless of their political party	6.32	6.59	6.38	6.37	6.31	6.27
Shift power back from the executive branch to the legislative branch by increasing Congressional oversight and action over regulations created by the executive branch and federal agencies	5.95	7.09	7.06	6.74	5.70	5.40

Proposals that were the stronger performers (above a 7) related to oversight and additional clarity into the legislative process, including requiring Members to publish voting records on official websites (7.59), making Congress pass bills to fund government departments separately so the public can understand what is in them (7.46), and making Congress pass a budget every two years (7.09).

Reflecting what we heard in the qualitative research, many of the reform proposals were viewed as basic requirements that should already be happening. Moreover the belief was that the proposals would help bring Congress back to focusing on its basic responsibilities and fulfilling the legislative branch's original Constitutional role.

As we found in the focus groups, people tended to react to the slate of proposals rather than to a single proposal. The quotes below illustrate voters' views about the impact of the reform proposals:

Independent: It looks like many of these would be putting into action a step in the right direction.

Republican: I kind of like a little bit of everything. It's hard to just choose one or two because there are a lot of key words in here like "make" and "require" and "improve" and "create." So it's hard for me just to pick one or two out of it because...we're already supposed to do that but they don't.

- Among conservative Republicans, the top performing proposals were generally the same as they were among voters overall, in addition to requiring Congressional approval of funding for new regulations (7.67). Conservative Republicans were naturally more interested in shifting power away from the executive branch (7.06) than voters overall (5.95).
- Independents were the most interested in requiring Members to publish their voting records (7.63) and making Congress pass bills to fund government departments separately (7.46).

- For Democrats, they were focused on many of the same items that Republicans are, but especially making it harder for Senators to filibuster must-pass budget and appropriations bills (7.19) because they may perceive this as a way to help the President.
- Tea party voters were enthusiastic about several items, particularly requiring Members to publish voting records (8.24), making Congress pass bills to fund departments separately (8.01), as well as other proposals relating to budget and oversight.

For the joint committee proposal, it ranked in a moderate-level tier, coming in at 6.71, but the broader significance of this proposal is that is the entry point for making many of the other proposals happen.

Impact of Reform Proposals

Impact on Accountability

In the qualitative research back in December, it was clear that accountability was what voters are looking for from Congressional reform, and that this is the lens by which voters evaluate reform proposals. Below are select quotes from the voter focus group discussions about accountability as the outcome of reforming Congress:

Republican: When I see the Congress reforming, I would look for more accountability.

Independent: I have to go back to accountability. That's where it always is with me, because I don't think they are held accountable.

A clear majority (72%) felt that the reform proposals would help the level of accountability in Congress (72-2-23 help-hurt-no impact), with Republicans (80%) and tea party voters (90%) being even more likely to view these as helpful. This is important and meaningful as Republicans are especially concerned about accountability in their list of concerns about Congress.

Impact on accountability						
	Overall	Tea Party	Cons Rep	Rep	Ind	Dem
Help	72	90	78	80	71	66
Hurt	2	1	0	1	2	3
No impact	23	9	20	18	23	28

Impact on Understanding of the Legislative Process

Reflecting the reaction in the focus groups, the slate of reform proposals provided some clarity into the legislative process. 70% of voters say it would help their understanding of the legislative

process, with higher percentages among conservative Republicans (77%), Republicans (76%) and those who consider themselves part of the tea party movement (87%).

Impact on your understanding of the legislative process						
	Overall	Tea Party	Cons Rep	Rep	Ind	Dem
Help	70	87	77	76	66	69
Hurt	1	1	0	1	1	1
No impact	27	11	21	22	33	28

The slate of proposals would also help those who understand the process well and those who describe their understanding of the process as “not well”:

- Among those who say they understand the legislative process well, 71% say it would help their understanding (71-0-27 help-hurt-no impact).
- Among those who say they understand the process “not well”, two-thirds say it would help them understand the process better (65-2-27 help-hurt-not well).

Impact on Your Voice Being Heard

In addition to improving accountability and understanding of the process, voters felt that the reform proposals would help their voices to be heard (59%), although this was not as high as what we observed with accountability (72% help) and helping the understanding of the legislative process (70%). Republicans (67%) and tea party voters (71%) were even more inclined to feel that their voices would be heard through the reform proposals than voters overall (59%).

Impact on your voice being heard						
	Overall	Tea Party	Cons Rep	Rep	Ind	Dem
Help	59	71	64	67	54	55
Hurt	1	1	1	1	1	3
No impact	37	26	31	28	44	40

Among those who feel their voices are not heard, a majority (58%) felt that this slate of proposals would help their voices be heard (58-1-39 help-hurt-no impact), and among those who already feel their voices are heard, it would be helpful to them also (63-1-31 help-hurt-no impact).

Conclusion

Given the current state of the political and policy discourse, the electorate is ready to see movement toward increased accountability in Congress. Reform is a first step toward beginning to restore the public's trust in governing institutions. Reform will help provide a structure that will raise the level of accountability, provide clarity to the legislative process, and help voters' voices to be heard.

Methodology

This report is a summary of findings from a recent national survey for Congressional Institute (April 20-21, 1000 registered voters), including findings from focus groups of Republican and independent voters in Columbus, OH, in December 2015.

The research was conducted by the Winston Group.

Appendix

Table 1 - Overall Congressional Job Approval

Why do you approve?						
	Overall	Tea Party	Cons Rep	Rep	Ind	Dem
They are doing a great job/going in the right direction/overall approval	72	66	57	66	79	76
They are keeping the President in check	8	21	22	14	-	5
They provide jobs/employ people	6	-	-	8	3	5
They are trying to improve the economy	4	11	6	7	3	-

Table 2 - Overall Congressional Job Disapproval

Why do you disapprove?						
	Overall	Tea Party	Cons Rep	Rep	Ind	Dem
Ineffective/not doing anything/ doesn't do a good job/taking the wrong direction	44	40	44	43	47	42
Obstructionist/not willing to compromise/fighting against Obama	27	13	13	15	26	37
They are not for the people/ country/Concerned only with themselves	22	26	25	25	22	20
Unfavorable views on particular stances/issues/policies	16	24	18	19	14	15
They are corrupt/greedy/Favor big businesses/special interest groups/ They can't be trusted	8	16	13	11	13	5
They are not for the economy/jobs	6	1	6	9	3	5
Fiscally irresponsible/overspending	5	10	9	8	7	2
Too partisan/too much politics involved	5	1	3	4	4	7

Table 3 - Your Member Job Approval

Why do you approve?						
	Overall	Tea Party	Cons Rep	Rep	Ind	Dem
They are doing a good job/doing his best/country is doing well/doing the right thing	40	22	33	38	37	44
Agree with his ideas/share their beliefs/policies on particular issues	16	18	26	21	11	14
Represents the people/for the people	14	32	14	12	16	15
Helped the economy/bring more jobs	8	7	7	10	6	7
Positive mentions about the members in Congress (great man, good person, hard working, etc)	7	4	7	5	6	7
Address/understand important issues	5	2	4	3	12	3
Fair/Knows how to listen to both parties	4	-	4	3	3	6
Can be trusted/honest/Firm stand on their beliefs	4	11	6	5	7	2
Approve of Republican/conservative	2	9	7	5	2	-
Approve of Democrats/liberal	2	-	-	-	1	5

Table 4 - Your Member Job Disapproval

Why do you disapprove?						
	Overall	Tea Party	Cons Rep	Rep	Ind	Dem
Not doing a good job/nothing is done/headed in the wrong direction	44	49	42	42	43	46
Don't like their views/stance on a particular issue	19	32	26	21	19	15
They are not for the people/state/only for themselves	18	17	19	23	19	10
Too partisan/part of the gridlock/not willing to compromise/too much politics/vote with the party only	13	-	4	7	15	19
Can't be trusted/Not keeping promises/Not being transparent	8	14	11	9	5	4
About the budget/debt/wasteful spending	7	9	13	11	6	2
Not helping the economy/job creation	7	6	5	5	6	11
They are for the rich/big businesses/They are greedy	6	10	5	5	6	6
They are Republican/conservative	6	7	1	4	3	12
They are Democrat/liberal	3	12	6	5	3	-

Table 5 - Concerns about Congress by Party

Concerns about Congress (on a scale of 1-9 with 1 being it does not concern you at all, 5 neutral and 9 being extremely concerning to you)

Tea Party	Conservative Republicans	Republicans	Independents	Democrats
The way Congress spends my money (8.36)	The way Congress spends my money (8.09)	The way Congress spends my money (7.96)	Lack of accountability (7.39)	Not fulfilling its Constitutional role (7.52)
Lack of accountability (8.10)	Lack of accountability (7.89)	Lack of accountability (7.79)	The way Congress spends my money (7.36)	Lack of accountability (7.51)
Your voice not being heard (7.86)	Not presenting a clear plan to voters and following through (7.49)	Not presenting a clear plan to voters and following through (7.36)	Not presenting a clear plan to voters and following through (7.26)	Not presenting a clear plan to voters and following through (7.43)
Not presenting a clear plan to voters and following through (7.57)	Not fulfilling its Constitutional role (7.49)	Your voice not being heard (7.33)	Influence of special interests (7.22)	Your voice not being heard (7.40)
Not fulfilling its Constitutional role (7.47)	Your voice not being heard (7.41)	Not fulfilling its Constitutional role (7.21)	Your voice not being heard (6.97)	The way Congress spends my money (7.27)
Influence of special interests (7.09)	Influence of special interests (7.05)	Influence of special interests (7.08)	Not fulfilling its Constitutional role (6.89)	Partisanship (7.18)
Gerrymandering of Congressional districts (6.19)	Partisanship (6.40)	Partisanship (6.41)	Partisanship (6.49)	Influence of special interests (7.06)
Partisanship (6.17)	Gerrymandering of Congressional districts (6.09)	Gerrymandering of Congressional districts (6.00)	Gerrymandering of Congressional districts (6.24)	Gerrymandering of Congressional districts (6.70)