

## AMERICANS' RESPONSE TO THE NOMINATION OF CLARENCE THOMAS

### AT EVERY POINT, THE PUBLIC AT LARGE, WOMEN AND MEN, BLACKS AND WHITES, BACKED THOMAS' CONFIRMATION

**Editor's Note:** The Senate hearings on the harassment charges October 12-14 grabbed the public's attention in a way no facet of a Court appointment ever did before. Huge audiences followed the televised sessions, and many people debated everything from the merits of the confirmation process itself to the matter of who was and wasn't telling the truth. But, surveys suggest strongly, few people changed their minds about whether Thomas should be confirmed. Every national survey from July 1 on showed plurality support for Thomas. The ABC News/Washington Post poll of September 15 had recorded 24% opposed to Thomas' getting a Supreme Court seat. On October 8, after Professor Anita Hill's allegations had been made public but prior to the resumption of the hearings, the ABC/Post poll found 25% opposed, and the next day's survey put opposition at 23%. The polls of October 12 and 13, taken while the hearings

Organization	Date	Sample Size	For or Against the Nomination, Confirmation		
			For	Against	No Opin./Not Sure
ABC/WP (1)	7/1	553	40	11	49
Black/USA (2)	7/3	402	54	17	29
Gallup (3)	7/11-14	1217	52	11	31
PSRA/TM(4)	7/11-14	1212	48	17	35
YCS (5)	7/17-18	1000	49	22	29
ABC (1)	7/25-28	1205	58	22	20
NBC/WSJ (6)*	7/26-29	1004	35	10	55
Wirthlin (7)	8/5-7	1000	42	23	35
Gallup (3)	8/8-11	1013	56	23	21
CBS/NYT (8)*	9/3-5	1843+	24	11	65
ABC (1)	9/13-15	1552+	59	23	18
ABC (9)	9/13-15	1552+	63	24	14
Gallup(3)	9/13-15	1216	54	25	21
NBC/WSJ (6)*	9/20-24	1510	46	12	42
LAT (10)	9/21-25	1623	54	19	27
Harris (11)	9/27-10/2	1249	53	39	7
ABC/WP (9)*	10/8	524	50	25	24
ABC (9)*	10/9	517	47	23	30
Harris (11)	10/9-13	1254	58	38	4
CBS/NYT (8)*	10/9	512	38	20	42
Gallup/CNN (3)	10/10-11	704	53	30	17
LAT (10)	10/12-13	1264	51	25	24
ABC (9)*	10/12	513	50	29	20
ABC (9)*	10/13	506	56	29	15
CBS/NYT (8)*	10/13	501	45	20	35
Black/USA (12)	10/13	962+	55	27	18
ABC (9)*	10/14	514	59	28	14
CBS (8)*	10/14	497	57	19	24
Gallup/CNN (3)	10/14	778	58	30	12

**Note:** The numbers in parentheses in the table, just after the name of the survey organization, refer to question wordings that follow. \*The "no opinion/not sure" column includes, depending on the survey organization, a variety of other responses, such as "still need more time" and "wait and see" [what the hearings show]. \*\*Combined 10/12 & 10/13. \*\*\*Combined 10/13 & 10/14. +Includes a substantial black oversample.

**Questions:** (1) Do you approve or disapprove of (Clarence) Thomas' nomination to the Supreme Court? (ABC News and the Washington Post) (2) Do you approve or disapprove of President Bush's nomination of Clarence Thomas to the Supreme Court? (Gordon Black/USA Today) (3) Would you like to see the Senate vote in favor of Clarence Thomas serving on the Supreme Court, or not? (Gallup) (4) Do you favor or oppose the confirmation of Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas? (Princeton Survey Research Associates for Times Mirror) (5) As you may know, President Bush recently nominated Clarence Thomas to replace

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were going on, reported slightly higher percentages against confirmation, 29% in each; the October 14 survey found 28% in opposition. This valuable series of surveys found some greater movement in public sentiment from support to "wait and see" and then back again to support at hearings' end. Overall, though, Thomas' margin was remarkably constant throughout.

Surveys by other organizations show much the same thing. Opposition bounced around in a narrow range from early August through the October vote—from the low twenties to low thirties. And, the size of the plurality favoring confirmation when the hearings ended—on the order of 25 to 30 points in many different studies—was basically what it had been two months earlier. If not many minds were changed by the much-watched hearings, though, opinion was undoubtedly firmed up on both sides. The greatest increase in opinion intensity, and almost certainly the most consequential one politically, occurred among black Americans.

Neither of the two main stories on group responses to Thomas unfolded the way many observers had expected. Thomas was strongly opposed by most Civil Rights organizations on grounds that his views ran contrary to black needs. But at every point a plurality of black Americans favored his confirmation, and in the end a large majority of blacks came down on Thomas' side. In many newsrooms and political offices, the big story was one of men/women differences on the nomination so large as to be a veritable "gender chasm." But most polls showed differences by gender to be both modest and inconsistent in the general public. Every survey found clear plurality support for Thomas' confirmation among women. Republicans and Democrats in the electorate at large were split much more sharply than were men and women, or blacks and whites.

Gender		Race		Party ID		
Men	Women	White	Black	Rep.	Dem.	Ind.
28/13/59	21/8/71	26/10/64	23/15/62	32/6/63	19/14/67	25/12/62
65/26/10	61/22/17	63/22/15	61/31/8	70/17/13	54/32/14	65/22/13
66/23/11	56/26/19	54/23/23	54/32/14	69/16/16	42/35/23	52/25/23
54/12/34	40/12/48	49/12/39	38/15/47			
54/24/22	47/26/27			64/16/21	40/36/25	53/23/24
51/23/26	43/23/34			61/16/23	41/27/33	42/26/32
43/22/35	33/18/49	38/21/41	36/19/44	43/11/46	29/29/43	43/20/37
58/28/14	49/32/19	52/31/17	68/24/9	63/21/16	45/39/16	49/34/17
59/28/13	43/31/26			62/19/21	42/37/22	51/32/17
64/23/12	49/34/18	50/31/19**	70/15/15**	65/25/11	48/34/17	58/28/14
46/20/34	44/20/36			54/11/35	36/30/34	44/17/39
61/27/13	57/28/15			70/20/10	57/36/8	54/29/17
64/19/17	50/19/31	51/20/29***	53/13/34***	70/10/20	46/25/29	53/23/24
60/29/11	57/30/13	57/31/12	69/20/11	75/14/10	48/41/11	51/36/13

Thurgood Marshall on the Supreme Court. From what you know, do you favor or oppose Thomas' nomination? (Yankelovich Clancy Shulman/Time/CNN) (6) Based on what you have seen or heard recently, do you favor or oppose the US Senate's confirming Clarence Thomas as a Justice of the US Supreme Court, or do you still need time to know more about him? (NBC News/Wall Street Journal) (7) Do you favor or oppose the nomination of Clarence Thomas to the Supreme Court? (Wirthlin Group) (8) Should the Senate vote to confirm Clarence Thomas as Justice to the US Supreme Court, or vote against Thomas, or can't you say? (CBS News/New York Times) (9) Do you think the Senate should or should not confirm Thomas' nomination to the Supreme Court? (ABC News) (10) Do you think the US Senate should vote to confirm Judge Clarence Thomas as a Supreme Court Justice or should the Senate reject Thomas' nomination to the Court? (Los Angeles Times) (11) If you had to make up your mind today, would you favor or oppose Judge Clarence Thomas for the US Supreme Court? (Louis Harris & Associates) (12) Based on what you now know, do you think the Senate should or should not confirm Clarence Thomas' nomination to the Supreme Court? (Gordon Black/USA Today)