

ABC NEWS POLL: THOMAS, ISRAEL AND THE PRESIDENT

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**BUSH BACKED ON THOMAS & ISRAEL
BUT FAULTED ON DOMESTIC AGENDA**

Most Americans support George Bush on Clarence Thomas' nomination and the issue of loan guarantees for Israel. But a large majority faults the president for a lack of attention to domestic issues, an ABC News poll has found.

On Thomas, 61 percent approve of the Supreme Court nominee's testimony before the Senate Judiciary Committee, including his refusal to take a position on abortion. Sixty-three percent favor Thomas' confirmation as a Supreme Court justice.

On Israel, respondents overwhelmingly supported Bush's call for a delay in Congress' consideration of loan guarantees for Israel. A majority was inclined to oppose the guarantees, probably reflecting a general antipathy toward foreign aid.

But while the public supports Bush on Thomas and Israel, a sizable majority faults him for a lack of attention to domestic issues: Sixty-six percent said he spends too much time on foreign affairs and not enough time on domestic problems.

The charge that Bush lacks a domestic agenda is the main criticism of the president that resonates with the public as the 1992 election year approaches. Concern about his overall domestic performance was even higher than criticism specifically of his handling of the economy (53 percent disapproved).

A strong majority, 73 percent, continued to approve of Bush's handling of foreign affairs. His overall job approval rating is 69 percent, down from his postwar peak of 90 percent six months ago but still high, particularly in troubled economic times.

ON THE THOMAS NOMINATION - The poll reached these findings on Thomas:

- Opposition to Thomas, from such groups as the NAACP, the National Organization for Women and the AFL-CIO, has had little impact on the public. Overall, 59 percent approve of his nomination, including 58 percent of blacks and 58 percent of women. Those numbers are basically unchanged from an ABC poll in late July.

- While the NAACP has charged that Thomas is out of touch with issues of importance to blacks, 61 percent of all respondents - and 55 percent of black respondents - said he does understand the concerns of most black Americans. However, 41 percent of blacks said he does not understand most blacks' concerns. The survey included an oversample of 319 black respondents.

- Support for Thomas' confirmation similarly crossed demographic lines. Among all respondents, 63 percent said he should be confirmed. Among blacks, 61 percent favored his confirmation; among women, an identical 61 percent favored it. Even among Democrats a majority, 54 percent, supported confirmation.
- Sixty percent of respondents supported Roe v. Wade, the 1973 Supreme Court decision legalizing abortion. But an overwhelming 85 percent said Thomas' position on abortion should not be the deciding factor in his nomination. And 61 percent said he was right not to discuss his views on abortion at last week's Senate hearings.
- Most Americans have paid little attention to the Thomas hearings: Only 43 percent followed them "very" or "somewhat" closely, while 57 percent followed them "not too closely" or "not closely at all." Overall, 61 percent approved of Thomas' performance as a witness; among those who watched closely, even more approved - 76 percent.
- Thirty-one percent said the Supreme Court tends to be too conservative, nearly twice the number who called it too liberal - and a plurality. 41 percent, said Thomas would make the court more conservative. Six in 10 called it appropriate for the Senate to consider his political views as well as his judicial qualifications.
- The one negative for Thomas is a 14-point increase in the number of Americans who think Bush could have found a more qualified candidate - from 23 percent in early July to 37 percent now. But 45 percent still say Thomas was among the best candidates available. Eighteen percent remain unsure.

ON ISRAEL - Despite current tensions between the United States and Israel, most Americans (68 percent) favor maintaining current ties between the two nations rather than weakening or strengthening them. Most (59 percent) also support the current level of U.S. economic and military aid to Israel.

Bush's call for delays in Congress' consideration of loan guarantees for Israel won the approval of 86 percent of respondents. A majority, 58 percent, said Israel should not be given the loan guarantees, but this is an unfamiliar issue on which opinions may be lightly held. The finding may reflect general public opposition to foreign aid, particularly during economic difficulties at home, rather than any specific opposition to aid to Israel.

Indeed a majority of respondents, 57 percent, said their sympathies are more with Israel than with the Arab nations in the Middle East conflict; just 20 percent said their sympathies are more with the Arab nations. And the number of Americans who think Israel has too much influence with the U.S. government remains a minority, 37 percent.

BUSH & POLITICS - While Bush's vulnerability on his domestic performance has a partisan tinge, the concerns do cross party lines. Even a slim majority of Republicans (51 percent) say he spends too much time on foreign problems and not enough time on domestic problems; so do 68 percent of independents and 77 percent of Democrats.