



CBS NEWS POLL

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SONIA SOTOMAYOR'S SUPREME COURT HEARINGS BEGIN
July 9-12, 2009

Senate confirmation hearings are about to begin, but just four in ten Americans have an opinion of Supreme Court nominee Sonia Sotomayor - consistent with the historical pattern for nominees. Those with an opinion tend to be favorable and think she should be confirmed, though opposition has risen in the last month. Two thirds of Americans think it is important that another woman serve on the Supreme Court.

23% have a favorable view of Judge Sotomayor now and 15% are unfavorable. Attacks by her opponents have increased as the hearings have drawn near, and positive opinions of Sotomayor have dropped and negative ones have risen since last month.

OPINION OF SOTOMAYOR

	Now	6/2009
Favorable	23%	33%
Unfavorable	15	9
Undecided/haven't heard enough	62	58

But six in ten Americans still are undecided or say they haven't heard enough about her yet to make a judgment. That is not unusual for a Supreme Court nominee just prior to his or her confirmation hearings; majorities could not assess previous nominees before their hearings either. In fact, somewhat more people have opinions of Sotomayor now than had opinions of past nominees before their hearings.

SONIA SOTOMAYOR VS. PAST NOMINEES

	Now	1/2006	9/2005	9/1991	8/1990	9/1987
	Sotomayor	Alito	Roberts	Thomas	Souter	Bork
Favorable	23%	16%	25%	26%	13%	11%
Unfavorable	15	7	8	10	5	12
Undecided/ Haven't heard enough	62	77	66	64	81	77

Partisan differences in opinions of Supreme Court nominees are also not unusual. In this poll, Democrats (39%) have a more positive opinion of Sotomayor than do Republicans (8%).

Since Justice Sandra Day O'Connor's 2005 retirement, just one woman - Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg -- sits on the Supreme Court. Two thirds of Americans think it is important to have another woman on the Court, including 72% of women, 79% of Democrats and 57% of Republicans.

IMPORTANCE OF ANOTHER WOMAN ON SUPREME COURT

	All	Men	Women
Very important	35%	26%	42%
Somewhat important	31	31	30
Not very/not at all important	32	37	26

In July 2005, after O'Connor's resignation, 58% of Americans thought it was very or somewhat important that George W. Bush nominate a woman to the Supreme Court. Instead, President Bush named now-Chief Justice John Roberts and then (after Chief Justice William Rehnquist's death) Samuel Alito to replace her.

Just over half think it is important to have a Hispanic serve on the Supreme Court. In September 1991, before the start of Clarence Thomas' hearings, a similar percentage thought it was important to have a black person on the Court.

IMPORTANCE OF HISPANIC ON SUPREME COURT

Very important	21%
Somewhat important	32
Not very/not at all important	45

67% of Democrats, but just 36% of Republicans, think this is important.

By two to one, Americans think Sotomayor ought to be confirmed. However just over half can't yet say. And opposition has risen slightly.

SHOULD SENATE VOTE TO CONFIRM...?

	Now	6/2009
Yes	30%	34%
No	14	9
Can't say	52	53

Most Americans think that if she does serve on the Supreme Court, Sotomayor will treat all groups of Americans the same when she makes her judicial decisions. Just 21% think she will favor certain groups over others.

WILL SOTOMAYOR FAVOR CERTAIN GROUPS OVER OTHERS WHEN MAKING DECISIONS?

	Now	6/2009
Yes, favor certain groups	21%	18%
No, treat all groups the same	60	55

This poll was conducted among a random sample of 944 adults nationwide, interviewed by telephone July 9-12, 2009. Phone numbers were dialed from samples of both standard land-line and cell phones. The error due to sampling for results based on the entire sample could be plus or minus three percentage points. The error for subgroups is higher.

This poll release conforms to the Standards of Disclosure of the National Council on Public Polls.

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q40 Is your opinion of Supreme Court nominee Sonia Sotomayor favorable, not favorable, undecided, or haven't you heard enough about Sonia Sotomayor yet to have an opinion?

	*** TOTAL RESPONDENTS ***				Jun09a
	Total	*** Party ID ***			
	%	Rep %	Dem %	Ind %	%
Favorable	23	8	39	19	33
Not favorable	15	30	5	14	9
Undecided	23	16	22	26	22
Haven't heard enough	39	45	33	41	36
Refused	0	1	1	0	0

q41 What do you think right now? Should the Senate vote to confirm Sonia Sotomayor as a Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, or vote against Sotomayor, or can't you say?

Vote to confirm	30	12	52	21	34
Vote against	14	29	7	12	9
Can't say	52	58	38	61	53
Don't know/No answer	4	1	3	6	4

q42 How important do you think it is for there to be another woman on the Supreme Court? Would you say it is very important, somewhat important, not very important or not important at all?

Very important	35	17	51	30
Somewhat important	31	40	28	28
Not very important	14	16	10	17
Not important at all	18	25	11	19
Don't know/No answer	2	2	0	6

q43 How important do you think it is for there to be a Hispanic on the Supreme Court? Would you say it is very important, somewhat important, not very important or not important at all?

Very important	21	8	31	19
Somewhat important	32	28	36	30
Not very important	20	25	17	20
Not important at all	25	37	15	25
Don't know/No answer	2	2	1	6

q44 If Sonia Sotomayor is confirmed to sit on the Supreme Court, do you think she will favor certain groups over others when making her judicial decisions, or do you think she will treat all groups the same under the law?

Will favor certain groups	21	34	11	23	18
Will treat all groups the same	60	43	75	57	55
Depends (vol.)	2	2	2	2	2
DK/NA	17	21	12	18	25

	<u>Unweighted</u>	<u>Weighted</u>	
Total Respondents	944		
Total Republicans	256	220	(23%)
Total Democrats	314	332	(35%)
Total Independents	374	392	(42%)