



Unaffected By Bitburg, Embargo

Reagan's Performance Rating Bounces Back; Recent Controversies Have Little Fall-Out

By George Gallup, Jr.

PRINCETON, N.J. — Although a substantial proportion of Americans fault President Reagan for both his visit to the Bitburg cemetery and his embargo on trade with Nicaragua, his overall standing with the public seems not to have suffered.

In fact, the recent decline in the President's performance rating, from 64% approval in late-January to 52% in mid-April, now appears to have ended. In the latest (mid-May) Gallup Poll, 55% approve of Reagan's overall performance in office while 37% disapprove and 8% withhold judgment. The latest survey was conducted prior to announcement of the President's tax proposal.

While the 3 percentage-point improvement since April in Reagan's competency rating in itself is not statistically significant, it nonetheless marks the first uptick in his ratings' trend in almost four months.

Fewer Fence-Sitters?

As shown in the following table, while Reagan's approval ratings have fluctuated since March, the proportion disapproving has remained at a rock-steady 37% in all three surveys conducted during this period, with an unusually high 11% undecided vote recorded in the April survey.

An hypothesis was advanced at that time that some people may have switched from being moderate Reagan supporters to fence-sitters, awaiting future developments before recommitting themselves. If that hypothesis still holds, the new survey findings suggest that these quondam fence-sitters, in fact, are recommitting themselves, and in the President's favor.

Following is the question asked to determine Reagan's overall performance rating and the trend since last November's election:

Do you approve or disapprove of the way Ronald Reagan is handling his job as president?

Reagan Performance Ratings

| | Approve % | Disapprove % | No opinion % |
|------------------|--------------|-----------------|--------------------|
| 1985 - May 17-20 | 55 | 37 | 8 |
| - April 12-15 | 52 | 37 | 11 |
| - March 8-11 | 56 | 37 | 7 |
| - Feb. 15-18 | 60 | 31 | 9 |
| - Jan. 25-28 | 64 | 28 | 8 |
| - Jan. 11-14 | 62 | 29 | 9 |
| 1984 - Dec. 7-10 | 59 | 32 | 9 |
| - Nov. 30-Dec. 3 | 62 | 30 | 8 |
| - Nov. 9-12 | 61 | 31 | 8 |

Defectors Return To Reagan Camp

The current reversal in Reagan's downward trend in approval since early this year also marks a return to the President's camp of certain population segments that had been among the heaviest defectors in the April survey.

In that survey, for example, an 11 percentage-point difference separated the views of men and women, with 58% of men but only 47% of women approving of Reagan's job performance, suggesting a return of the now-familiar gender gap that has plagued Reagan throughout his presidential tenure. With the new survey, the gap has returned to a more typical 4 points, with 57% of men and 53% of women approving of Reagan's conduct in office.

Public Divided On Bitburg Visit

Public opinion about the controversial Bitburg affair is evenly divided, with 42% approving and an equal number disapproving of the President's May 5 visit to the German military cemetery. Somewhat greater approval is expressed by men, younger Americans of both sexes, college-educated and upper-income groups, and Republicans, than by their counterparts. However, even among

these strong Reagan constituencies, significant proportions disapprove of the Bitburg visit, including 25% of Republicans and 26% of persons who approve of Reagan's job performance in general.

Following is the question asked:

Do you approve or disapprove of President Reagan's visiting the Bitburg cemetery?

Here are the national results:

Bitburg Visit

| | |
|------------------|------|
| Approve..... | 42% |
| Disapprove | 42 |
| No opinion | 16 |
| | 100% |

Survey respondents who indicated they were familiar with President Reagan's May 7 embargo on Nicaragua — 54% of the total — were asked:

Do you approve or disapprove of the embargo on trade with Nicaragua?

Following are the national results:

Embargo On Nicaragua
(Based on aware group)

| | |
|------------------|------|
| Approve..... | 46% |
| Disapprove | 37 |
| No opinion | 17 |
| | 100% |

The latest results are based on in-person interviews with 1,528 adults, 18 and older, conducted in over 300 scientifically selected localities across the nation during the period May 17-20. For results based on samples of this size, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling and other random effects could be 3% in either direction.

In addition to sampling error, the reader should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls. *These statements conform to the standards of disclosure of the National Council on Public Polls.*