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Poll: Clinton approval soars

By: Eamon Javers
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A new poll of avid news watchers shows that Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has a much higher approval rating than the man she once campaigned against and now works for, President Barack Obama.

In the poll of 800 registered voters who are self-identified "news watchers," Clinton had a 75 percent approval rating and a 21 percent disapproval rating overall. Obama, in contrast, had a 51 percent approval and a 45 percent disapproval rating.

The Secretary of State has conducted several well-received foreign trips in recent months and has not been as closely identified with the more contentious elements of the Administration's agenda, including the health care fight, the federal deficit and the Wall Street bailouts. And she has not been subjected to nearly the same media and partisan scrutiny as the president. Obama, meanwhile, has been on national television on a daily basis tackling a wide range of difficult issues.

The poll was conducted by the nonpartisan Clarus Research Group from December 7th to the 12th, and it asked for opinions of the top Cabinet secretaries and White House officials. Its finding on Obama and Clinton mirrors that of earlier polls – in October, for example, a Gallup poll found that Clinton had become more popular than the president.

Clarus president Ron Faucheux said one reason for Clinton's high poll numbers is her high approval among Republicans – numbers he said position her well to run for president again in the future, if she chooses. Clinton had 96 percent approval among Democrats, a healthy 57 percent approval among Republicans, and 65 percent approval among Independents. Obama was nearly as popular among Democrats – 93 percent – but his numbers among Republicans and Independents fell off dramatically, at 19 percent and 33 percent respectively.

Clinton's Republican numbers are striking, given how intensely disliked she has been in the past among GOP voters. In fact, part of Obama's appeal to Democratic primary voters in 2008 was that he was more likely to be able to bridge the partisan divide than Clinton, who was by then a well-known figure dating to her time as first lady in the 1990s.

"Republicans may see her as being more hawkish than other Democrats on foreign policy issues," said Faucheux. "It may be a way for them to bolster that position within the administration." Asked about any future Clinton presidential bid, he said, "She's in good shape now."

The next highest-rated cabinet secretary in the survey was Defense Secretary Robert Gates, who notched a 69 percent overall approval rate with a 78 percent approval among Democrats and 63

percent among both Republicans and independents.

“Both Clinton and Gates did well across the partisan board,” said Faucheux. “Everybody else did well among Democrats but fell off among Republicans.”

Another trend spotted by the pollsters: Approval ratings inside the Beltway were higher than in the rest of the country. “These results show that the ‘Beltway echo chamber’ does not reflect the rest of the country, even among news watchers,” said Faucheux.

Among White House staffers and advisors, Press Secretary Robert Gibbs – who is often seen on television – had the highest overall rating at 50 percent. Economic advisor Larry Summers had the lowest approval, at 25 percent.

Summers and Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner – who are both closely associated with the economy – both posted higher disapproval numbers than approval. Summers’ disapproval rating was 41 percent. Geithner’s disapproval rating was 45 percent, one point higher than his approval rating.

The poll also found that White House Chief of Staff Rahm Emanuel, who is often viewed as having sharp partisan elbows, scored much higher among Democrats, at 72 percent, than Republicans, at 13 percent.

Among other major administration officials, Vice President Joe Biden had a 50 percent approval and 41 percent disapproval rating; Attorney General Eric Holder and HHS Secretary Kathleen Sebelius both posted 41 percent approval and 35 percent disapproval; Presidential Adviser David Axelrod scored 38 percent approval and 36 percent disapproval; and National Security Adviser James Jones had a 30 percent approval and 23 percent disapproval rating.

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