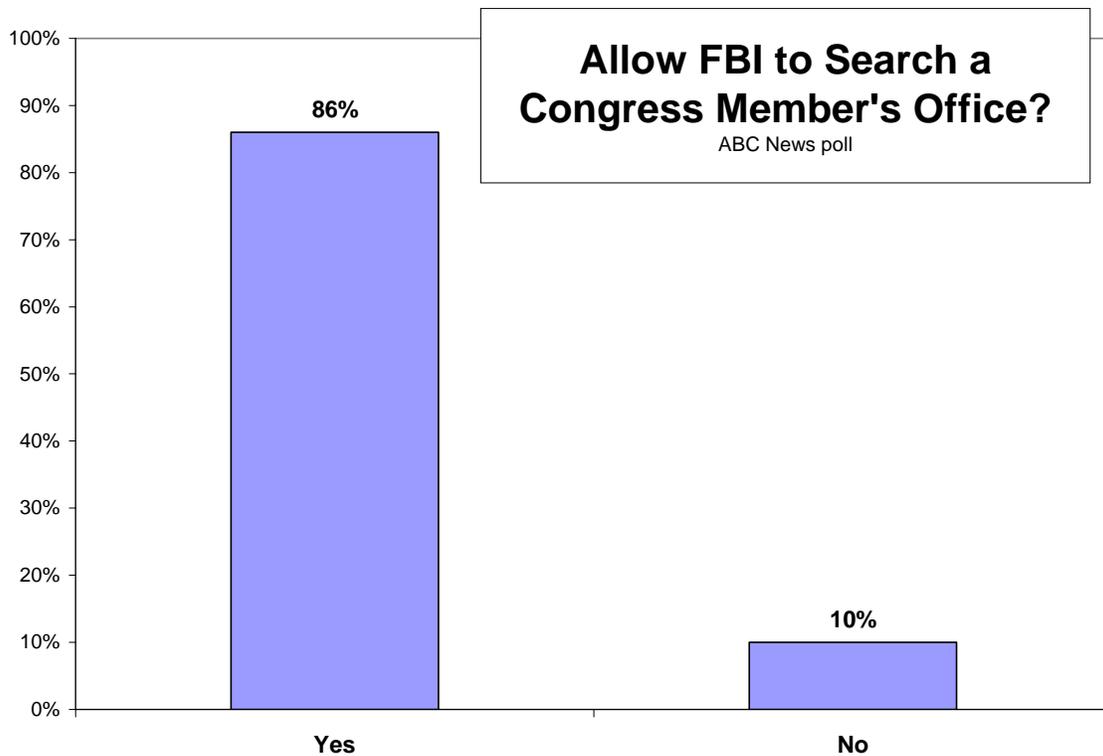


Public Sides with FBI In Congress Search Issue

In the rift between Congress and the Justice Department, Americans side overwhelmingly with law enforcement: Regardless of precedent and the separation of powers, 86 percent say the FBI should be allowed to search a Congress member's office if it has a warrant.

That view is broadly bipartisan, this ABC News poll finds, ranging from 78 percent among Democrats to 94 percent of Republicans.

The issue erupted last week, after the FBI searched the offices of Rep. William Jefferson, D-La., in a corruption investigation. Congress leaders objected, and George W. Bush put a 45-day hold on the seized documents to allow for negotiations.



The issue arises at a time of various investigations of alleged wrongdoing in Congress, including those focused on the activities of lobbyist Jack Abramoff.

Indeed this poll finds broad public skepticism about congressional ethics: Sixty-five percent of Americans give a negative rating to the ethics and honesty of members of

Congress. More, 54 percent, rate their own member's ethics positively, but that's down from 69 percent in a 1989 poll.

Nonetheless, support for FBI searches is about equally high whether people see Congress as honest or not. That suggests that the interests of law enforcement to investigate wrongdoing simply prevails in the public's mind over concerns about separation of powers, precedent, and the possibility prosecutors could use such searches to try to intimidate lawmakers. The question in this poll described both sides of the argument.

Politically, the Democrats have a small edge in perceived honesty, but there's not much advantage for either party on this issue. Sixteen percent of Americans think Democrats are generally more ethical and honest than Republicans; nine percent think the opposite. But most by far – 72 percent – say there isn't much difference between them.

However slight, that seven-point Democratic edge is their best in occasional polls over the last 17 years.

Views of the honesty of Congress overall have fluctuated over the years, but haven't been positive in polls since 1989. At its best, in 1990, 46 percent rated Congress as ethical and honest. Today just 27 percent do so, quite similar to the levels in 1995 and 1993 (24 and 29 percent, respectively.).

METHODOLOGY – This ABC News poll was conducted by telephone May 26-30, 2006, among a random national sample of 1,044 adults. The results have a three-point error margin. Field work by ICR-International Communications Research of Media, Pa.

Analysis by Gary Langer.

ABC News polls can be found at ABCNEWS.com at <http://abcnews.com/pollvault.html>.

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Full results follow.

1. The FBI recently got a search warrant and searched a U.S. Congressman's office in a corruption investigation. This is believed to be the first time in history federal agents have searched a Congress member's office. (Leaders of Congress say this should not be allowed because it violates the separation of powers in the U.S. Constitution and could be used by prosecutors to put improper political pressure on lawmakers.) ((Others/Some people) say this kind of search should be allowed if a court approves it as part of a criminal investigation.)

What's your opinion - do you think the FBI should or should not be allowed to search the office of a member of the U.S. Congress, if it's gotten a search warrant to do so?

	Should allow	Should not allow	No opinion
5/30/06	86	10	5

2. Would you rate the level of ethics and honesty of members of Congress as excellent, good, not so good or poor?

	--- Excellent/Good ---			--- Not so good/Poor ---			No opinion
	NET	Excellent	Good	NET	Not so good	Poor	
5/30/06	27	1	26	65	36	30	7
12/3/95	24	2	22	72	42	30	4
8/8/93	29	1	28	70	42	28	1
1/16/90	46	2	44	53	36	17	1
5/23/89	39	2	37	59	41	18	1

3. And would you rate the level of ethics and honesty of your own representative to the U.S. House of Representatives in Congress as excellent, good, not so good or poor?

	--- Excellent/Good ---			--- Not so good/Poor ---			No opinion
	NET	Excellent	Good	NET	Not so good	Poor	
5/30/06	54	9	45	36	23	13	10
5/23/89*	69	10	59	29	21	8	3

*"Your congressman"

4. When it comes to the level of ethics and honesty among politicians, do you think (the Democrats are generally better than the Republicans), (the Republicans are generally better than the Democrats), or isn't there much difference between them when it comes to ethics and honesty?

	Dems better	Reps better	No difference	No opinion
5/30/06	16	9	72	3
1/8/06	15	11	73	1
11/2/05	16	12	71	1
3/27/94	10	8	81	1
5/23/89	13	8	79	1

END