

Major Parties Struggle for Popularity; Interest in an Alternative is Broad

Favorable views of the Democratic Party have fallen to their lowest since the Reagan landslide of 1984, even fewer Americans see the Republican Party positively – and Americans by 2-1 say they'd welcome an independent alternative for president.

Being open to a third-party candidate is a far cry from actually voting for one. Still, 61 percent in the latest ABC News/Washington Post poll respond positively to the idea of an independent running for president against the two major-party nominees. Thirty-two percent say no thanks.

If having a choice is largely uncontroversial, the results nonetheless underscore the level of interest in alternatives – and the extent to which the two main parties are struggling for popularity a year from the 2012 election. The public now divides, 48-46 percent, in favorable vs. unfavorable views of the Democratic Party. And the GOP fares even less well: Fifty-three percent see it negatively, 40 percent favorably.

The Democratic Party's rating is its lowest in polls since November 1984, days before Ronald Reagan's landslide re-election, when it hit 47 percent favorable. The Republican Party is better off than its historic low in popularity (31 percent in 1998, upon the impeachment of Bill Clinton) but still 8 points below the Democrats. This poll was produced for ABC News by [Langer Research Associates](#).

Intensity of sentiment also tilts toward the Democratic Party: it's 8 points more apt than the GOP to be seen "strongly" favorably (21 percent vs. 13 percent) and 7 points less likely to be seen strongly unfavorably (25 percent vs. 32 percent). A key reason is that more Democrats are highly attuned to their own party (48 percent strongly favorable) than are Republicans to theirs (39 percent).

For its part, interest in a non-party alternative is broader than it is deep. While six in 10 Americans like the idea of an independent running for president, far fewer, 25 percent, endorse it strongly. And the reality is that partisanship retains a powerful pull; the best showing by a third-party candidate in recent times was Ross Perot's 18.9 percent in 1992 – then, as now, a time of broad economic discontent. Other top third-party vote-getters of the last century were Teddy Roosevelt, with 27.4 percent in 1912; and Robert "Fighting Bob" LaFollette, with 16.6 percent in 1924.

GROUPS – Interest in an independent candidate peaks, naturally, among independents themselves; 73 percent like the idea, vs. 57 percent of Republicans and 53 percent of Democrats. And 37 percent of independents "strongly" favor the notion.

Independents, as it happens, are in good supply these days: they've outnumbered Democrats and Republicans in ABC/Post polls steadily since 2009, by far the longest period in which they've done so in polling back to 1981.

	Favorable-unfavorable		
	Democratic Party	Republican Party	Independent candidate
All	48-46%	40-53	61-32
Democrats	84-13	15-82	53-40
Republicans	9-88	83-12	57-37
Independents	40-49	34-54	73-20
Liberals	73-21	18-76	61-33
Moderates	53-41	36-56	64-28
Somewhat conservatives	28-63	53-38	60-32
Very conservatives	22-77	69-30	59-35
Under 30	61-32	41-50	60-32
30 and up	44-50	39-54	61-32

Democrats and Republicans feel essentially the same about their chosen parties, with 84 and 83 percent, respectively, rating them favorably. (But with greater intensity among Democrats, as noted.) That drops precipitously among independents: 40 percent view the Democratic Party favorably; 34 percent, the Republican Party.

One reason the Democratic Party outpoints the GOP rests in ideology; another is age. In the latter, the Democratic Party jumps to a 61 percent favorable rating among young adults, age 18 to 29, then drops to 44 percent among their elders. Views of the GOP, by contrast, are level across age groups.

On ideology, 73 percent of liberals see the Democratic Party favorably, while fewer conservatives, 58 percent, express a favorable opinion of the Republican Party. (It's 69 percent among "very" conservatives, but 53 percent among "somewhat" conservatives.) Conservatives outnumber liberals by a substantial margin; but the Democratic Party also has an advantage among moderates, 53 percent favorable, vs. 36 percent for the GOP.

METHODOLOGY – This ABC News/Washington Post poll was conducted by landline and cell phone Oct. 26-30, 2011, among a random national sample of 1,003 adults. Results have a margin of [sampling error](#) of 3.5 points. The survey was produced for ABC News by [Langer Research Associates](#) of New York, N.Y., with sampling, data collection and tabulation by SSRS/Social Science Research Solutions of Media, Pa.

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

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Full results follow.

1. Overall, do you have a favorable or unfavorable impression of (ITEM)? Do you feel that way strongly or somewhat? (SCRAMBLE ITEMS)

a. The Democratic Party

	----- Favorable -----			----- Unfavorable -----			No opinion
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	
10/30/11	48	21	26	46	21	25	7
3/26/10	50	25	24	45	14	31	5
2/8/10	50	24	26	46	17	28	4
6/21/09	53	NA	NA	40	NA	NA	6
8/22/08 RV	58			36			5
11/1/07	51			45			5
3/5/06	55			41			4
6/5/05	51			47			2
12/15/02	56			37			6
1/27/02	56			36			8
7/30/01	60			36			4
12/15/00	64			25			11
1/16/00	56			35			9
1/10/00*	61			33			6
1/10/00 LV	58			37			5
11/21/99	51			41			8
5/2/99	53			37			10
2/21/99	55			37			8
2/13/99	56			38			6
2/8/99	57			37			6
1/10/99	57			35			8
12/20/98	57			30			13
12/16/98	58			32			10
10/29/97	54			39			7
9/1/96 RV	60			36			4
8/18/96 RV	55			41			4
8/7/96 RV	57			38			5
4/10/96	55			38			7
4/19/95	51			43			6
7/8/92 RV	54			38			8
6/6/91**	52			34			14
4/2/90	54			35			11
1/15/90	58			32			10
11/16/88	54			36			10
11/4/84	47			42			11
10/4/84 RV	50	"	"	39	"	"	11

*1/10/00 to 7/8/92: Gallup

**6/6/91 and previous: CBS News/New York Times

b. The Republican Party

	----- Favorable -----			----- Unfavorable -----			No opinion
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	
10/30/11	40	13	27	53	21	32	7
3/26/10	40	17	23	55	24	30	5
2/8/10	44	19	25	52	23	29	4
6/21/09	36	NA	NA	56	NA	NA	8
8/22/08 RV	47			49			4
11/1/07	39			56			5
3/5/06	51			46			3
6/5/05	49			49			2
12/15/02	56			38			5

1/27/02	63			30			7
7/30/01	51			46			3
12/15/00	54			35			11
1/16/00	53			37			10
1/10/00*	53			41			6
1/10/00 LV	56			39			5
11/21/99	50			44			6
5/2/99	47			44			9
2/21/99	45			46			9
2/13/99	40			54			5
2/8/99	45			47			8
1/10/99	40			52			8
12/20/98	31			57			12
12/16/98	43			47			10
10/29/97	50			42			8
9/1/96 RV	50			45			5
8/18/96 RV	55			41			4
8/7/96 RV	51			44			5
4/10/96	52			41			7
4/19/95	52			42			6
7/8/92 RV	53			39			8
6/6/91**	62			28			10
4/2/90	58			34			8
1/15/90	63			28			9
11/16/88	57			34			9
11/4/84	58			33			9
10/4/84	53	"	"	36	"	"	11

*1/10/00 to 7/8/92: Gallup

**6/6/91 and previous: CBS News/New York Times

c. The idea of an independent candidate running for president against the (Democratic) and (Republican) party nominees

	----- Favorable -----			----- Unfavorable -----			No
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	opinion
10/30/11	61	25	36	32	16	16	7

END