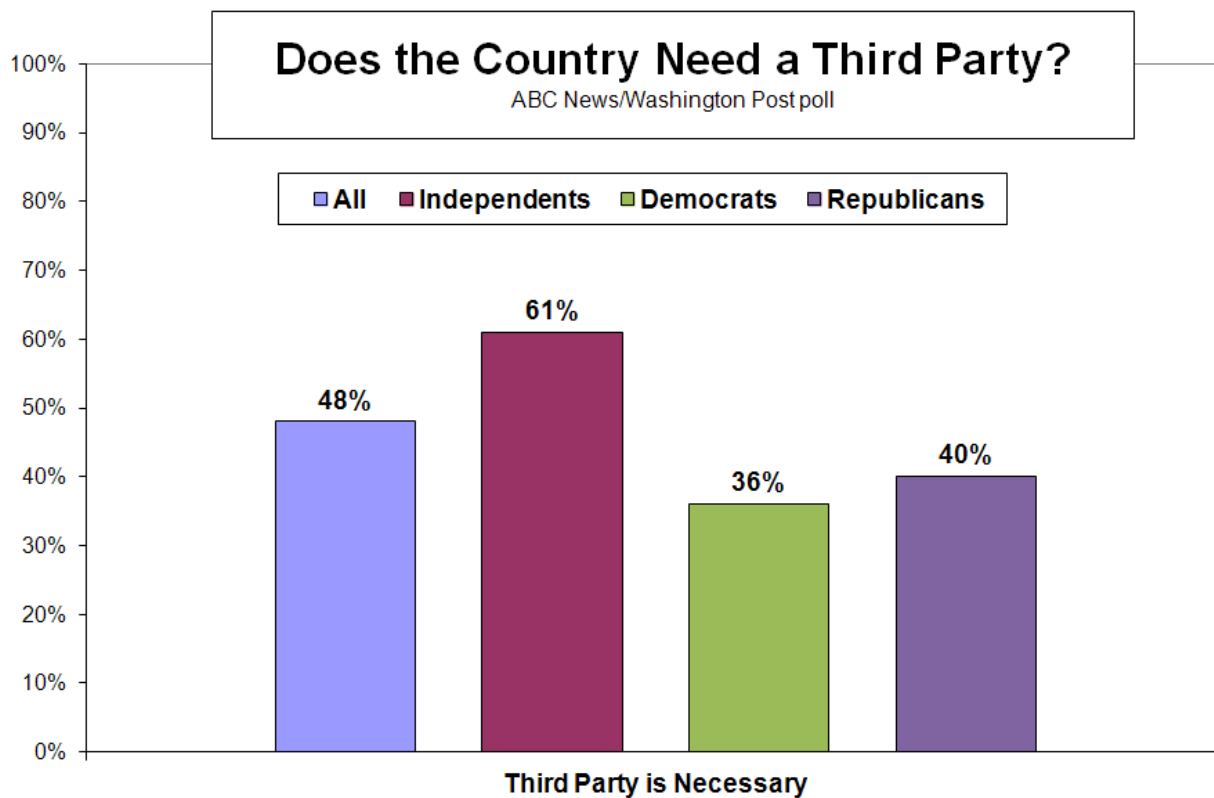


Nearly Half Call it Time for a Third Party; The Question: Whether They'd Support it

Nearly half of Americans say it's time for a new major political party, and nearly seven in 10 say they'd at least consider voting for its candidate for president. But that leaves open whether such a candidate, if one emerges, could in fact break the habit of traditional party loyalties.

Other results in the latest ABC News/Washington Post poll suggest it'd be a challenge. Just 22 percent say they'd definitely support a third-party candidate, even given one "with whom you agree on most issues." More, 28 percent, say they definitely would *not* support such a candidate, agreement on the issues notwithstanding. The rest would simply consider it.

Interest in a third-party candidate comes disproportionately from independents – a group that's grown to record heights in recent years, but also that's less likely to vote. Overall 48 percent of Americans think the country needs a third party, ranging from 61 percent of independents to 36 and 40 percent of Democrats and Republicans, respectively.



Moreover, fewer than one in three adults – 29 percent – feel “strongly” that a third party is needed, including fewer than half of independents, 40 percent. That raises the question of whether efforts to build one would have enough oomph to succeed.

This poll, produced for ABC by [Langer Research Associates](#), also finds that even among independents, just 28 percent say they’d definitely vote for a third-party candidate with whom they agreed on most issues. That’s more than the share of Democrats or Republicans who say so (15 and 19 percent), but hardly an overwhelming show of support.

PAUL – An ABC/Post poll last month measured the potential effect of one third-party run, by current Republican candidate Ron Paul. Tested as an independent against Mitt Romney and Barack Obama, Paul drew 21 percent support, pulling 5 points from Obama but 16 from Romney.

That puts Paul at the high end of actual performance by third-party candidates – the recent best performance was Ross Perot’s 19 percent in 1992. But many fade; Perot polled much higher earlier in the campaign. And Paul faces serious challenges, with half in his own party believing he’d pursue policies most Americans would find unacceptable.

Paul’s support nonetheless reflects disquiet among Republicans with their other options. Among Republicans and Republican-leaning independents who are dissatisfied with the current GOP candidates, support for a third party rises to 56 percent – with 45 percent feeling so “strongly.” Nearly a third of these dissatisfied Republicans also say they’d definitely vote for a third-party candidate with whom they agreed with on most issues. Among satisfied Republicans that dives to 12 percent.

GROUPS – While a Paul candidacy would hurt Romney, other third-party efforts could do more damage to Obama’s re-election hopes; liberals are much more apt than very conservative adults to think the country needs a third party, 60 percent vs. 34 percent. Indeed half of very conservatives feel strongly that a third party is unneeded. This appears to reflect a sense among some that they’ve already found their voice via the Tea Party movement.

One countervailing result, however, underscores loyalty to Obama in one of his core support groups, among racial minorities. In this group 42 percent flatly rule out supporting a third-party candidate. That declines to 24 percent among whites.

Among other groups, interest in a third party is highest among people under 50, dropping off particularly among seniors. Indeed four in 10 seniors say they definitely would not vote for an independent candidate, compared with a quarter of those 18 to 64.

Finally, economic dislocation plays something of a role. Willingness at least to consider a third-party candidate reaches 75 percent among people who’ve lost ground financially under Obama. That slips to 65 percent among those who say their finances have stayed the same or improved.

METHODOLOGY – This ABC News/Washington Post poll was conducted by telephone Jan. 12-15, 2012, among a random national sample of 1,000 adults, including landline and cell-

phone-only respondents. Results have a margin of [sampling error](#) of 3.5 points for the full sample. The survey was produced for ABC News by [Langer Research Associates](#) of New York, N.Y., with sampling, data collection and tabulation by Abt-SRBI of New York, N.Y.

Analysis by Damla Ergun and Gary Langer.

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

Media contacts: [David Ford](#), (212) 456-7243, and [Julie Townsend](#), (212) 456-4934.

Full results follow.

*= less than 0.5 percent

1-35, 38 previously released.

36. Some people say the country needs a third political party in addition to the Democratic and Republican parties, others say it's unnecessary. Do you think this country needs a third party or not? Do you feel that way strongly or somewhat?

	-- Third party needed --			-Third party NOT needed--			No
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	opinion
1/15/12	48	29	18	49	17	32	4

37. Say an independent, third party candidate with whom you agree on most issues entered the 2012 race for president. Would you definitely vote for that candidate, consider it, or would you definitely not vote for an independent, third-party candidate for president?

	Definitely	Consider	Definitely	No
	vote for	voting for	not vote for	Opinion
1/15/12	22	46	28	4

*** END ***