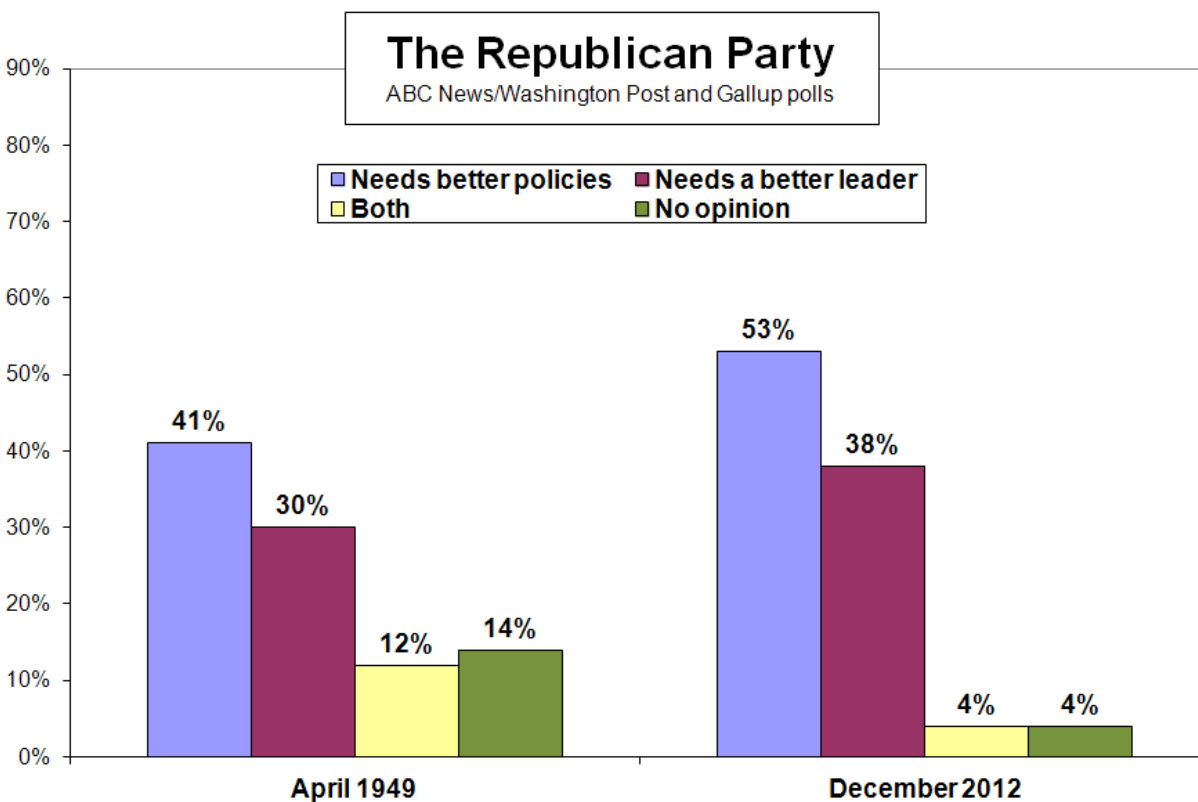


Fixing the GOP: Party Like It's 1949

Americans by a 15-point margin in the latest ABC News/Washington Post poll say the Republican Party needs less conservative policies that are more focused on middle- and lower-income Americans, rather than better leaders to sell its existing positions.

And 63 years ago, Americans by an 11-point margin said precisely the same thing.

Mark it up to the swinging pendulum of American politics: Six decades after Republican presidential nominee Thomas Dewey's unexpected loss to incumbent Democrat Harry S. Truman, the GOP is back in the same doghouse.



The question last was asked in 1949, months after Truman's victory in what's widely considered to be the greatest upset in presidential election history. The GOP, at that point, had lost five presidential races in a row, leading Gallup to ask:

“One group holds that the Republican Party is too conservative – that it needs a program concerned more directly with the welfare of the people, particularly those in the lower- and middle-income levels. The other group says that the policies of the Republican party are good – but the party needs a better leader to explain and win support for these policies.”

In 1949, respondents, asked which view best fit their own, took the first option by 41-30 percent, with an additional 12 percent volunteering that both applied equally.

Fast forward to 2012. Defeated last month by an incumbent Democrat, the Republican Party has lost the popular vote in five of the last six presidential elections. After hitting a 20-year high in 2003, allegiance to the GOP has dropped and shows no sign of recovery.

This poll, produced for ABC by [Langer Research Associates](#), repeated the 1949 Gallup question. The result: Fifty-three percent of Americans say the Republicans need to work on their policies. Thirty-eight percent see it, instead, as a leadership problem.

THEN/NOW – There are other parallels between 2012 and 1948. Mitt Romney came across as a stiff candidate, lacking the common touch – much the same commentary that described Dewey. Truman directed his fire at the “do-nothing” 80th Congress; Barack Obama, while stressing it less, benefitted from comparisons to the deeply unpopular 112th Congress.

And the 1948 economy was recovering after the recession of 1946-7; in the run-up to the 2012 vote the economy was recovering as well, with newly revised figures showing a 3.1 percent gain in GDP in the third quarter.

Finally, there was the sense in the 2012 election that Romney, one of the wealthiest men ever to seek the presidency, would, if elected, pursue policies that favored the well-off – a view expressed in the results of this survey, as it was about the Republican Party in 1949.

It should be noted that both parties have had their share of soul-searching: The Democrats also lost five of six presidential elections in recent times, from 1968 to 1988.

GROUPS – There are differences, of course, among groups. It’s noteworthy that even among conservatives, 30 percent say the GOP is too conservative and insufficiently focused on lower- and middle-income Americans, as do 35 percent of evangelical white Protestants, a core Republican group, and nearly a quarter of Republicans themselves.

Those numbers rise sharply among other groups, for instance, to 53 percent of independents and 60 percent of moderates, peaking at 79 percent of Democrats and 77 percent of liberals. There was, notably, much less partisan polarization on this question in 1949.

Other differences largely follow partisan and ideological patterns. While 49 percent of whites say the Republican Party needs less conservative policies and a greater focus on middle- and lower-income Americans, that jumps to 66 percent among nonwhites, a growing share of the electorate. It’s also much higher in the Northeast than in the South or Midwest, and higher among younger and the most highly educated Americans.

	Republican Party needs	
	Better policies	Better leaders
All	53%	38
Democrats	79	14
Republicans	23	64
Independents	53	40
Liberals	77	19
Moderates	60	32
Conservatives	30	58
Conservative Republicans	14	73
Liberal Democrats	88	8
Whites	49	41
Nonwhites	66	28
White Protestants		
Evangelical	35	56
Non-evangelical	52	38
Northeast	60	27
Midwest	49	39
South	50	42
West	55	36
18-39	57	35
65+	49	40
College/less	52	39
Post-grad	61	27
Income <\$50K	55	37
\$50-100K	52	38
\$100K plus	53	40

There's less of a difference, perhaps surprisingly, by income levels. Among people earning less than \$50,000 a year, 55 percent say the GOP needs greater focus on lower- and middle-income Americans. But among \$100,000-plus earners, essentially as many, 53 percent, say the same.

METHODOLOGY – This ABC News/Washington Post poll was conducted by telephone Dec. 13-16, 2012, among a random national sample of 1,002 adults, including landline and cell-phone-only respondents. Results have a margin of sampling error of 3.5 points, including design effect. Partisan divisions are 31-24-38 percent, Democrats-Republicans-independents.

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 Gary Langer.

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

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Full results follow.

*= less than 0.5 percent

1-7; 8-31 previously released or held for release.

8. There are two different points of view as to why the Republican Party has lost the popular vote in five of the last six presidential elections. Which of these two views do you, yourself, think is more nearly right... One group holds that the Republican Party is too conservative and needs a program concerned more directly with the welfare of the people, particularly those in the lower and middle income levels. The other group says that the policies of the Republican Party are good--but the party needs a better leader to explain and win support for these policies.

	Republican Party needs better policies	Republican Party needs a better leader	Both (vol.)	Other (vol.)	No opinion
12/16/12	53	38	4	2	4
4/15/49*	41	30	12	3	14

*Gallup. "...has not won the last five presidential elections."

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