

Public Divides on College Players Union But Most Nix Salaries for Student Athletes

With March Madness focusing fans on college sports, a new ABC News/Washington Post poll finds Americans split evenly on whether college athletes should be allowed to unionize. But most, regardless, say students shouldn't be paid to play.

The public divides by 47-47 percent on whether student athletes should be able to create a union, like those in professional sports. But Americans by 2-1 oppose what might seem like a logical extension, allowing college players to receive salaries.

The subject is of interest, given that 56 percent of adults describe themselves as college sports fans. And there are sharp divides among groups, including by age, race, income and education – and, on the issue of salaries, by sex and fandom.

This issue received attention last month, when members of Northwestern University's football team sought government recognition as university employees, a first step toward unionization. Supporters say that, given the profitability of college sports, student athletes should have more say about the terms and conditions under which they play. Opponents counter that unionization would undermine the basis of college athletics as non-professional, student competition.

GROUPS – This poll, produced for ABC by [Langer Research Associates](#), finds the sharpest divisions in views on unionization by race and age. Sixty-six percent of nonwhites and 64 percent of those younger than 40 support the idea, dropping steeply to 38 percent of whites and those 40 and older alike.

In a related result, support falls from 57 percent among people with household incomes less than \$50,000 to 40 percent among those with higher incomes. Lower-income nonwhites are especially supportive of the idea, with 73 percent in favor, vs. 44 percent of lower-income whites.

There are similar splits in views on paying salaries to college athletes. Strikingly, more than twice as many nonwhites as whites support the idea, 51 vs. 24 percent. And there are smaller, 11- and 12-point gaps among the age and income groups noted above.

	Support for college athletes to...	
	Unionize	Get paid
All	47%	33%
Whites	38	24
Nonwhites	66	51
18-39	64	40
40+	38	29

Income <\$50K	57	39
Income \$50K+	40	27
Nonwhites, <\$50K	73	56
Whites, <\$50K	44	26
Men	46	40
Women	49	27
White men	35	32
White women	40	17
Fan	50	37
Not a fan	44	27
Democrats	62	42
Republicans	28	22
Independents	47	30

Among other groups, men are more likely than women to support salaries for college athletes, 40 vs. 27 percent, though their views on unionization are about the same. Race again plays a role: About half of nonwhite men and women alike support paying salaries; that drops to 32 percent of white men, and falls further among white women, to just 17 percent.

Fandom peaks in three groups. Men are more likely than women to be college sports fans, 66 vs. 47 percent. So are Southerners (65 percent are fans) vs. those in the rest of the country (51 percent, with little regional differentiation). And nearly two-thirds of those with household incomes of \$100,000 or more call themselves fans, compared with 54 percent of those earning less. There's little difference among other groups.

Finally, there's a partisan divide on the questions of unionization and compensation. Forty-two percent of Democrats support allowing athletes to receive salaries, compared with 30 percent of independents and 22 percent of Republicans. Similarly, more than six in 10 Democrats and nearly half of independents support allowing college players to unionize. That falls to just fewer than three in 10 Republicans.

METHODOLOGY – This ABC News/Washington Post poll was conducted by telephone Feb. 27-March 2, 2014, in English and Spanish, 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.

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 Christopher Weiss.

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

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Full results follow.

* in data columns = less than 0.5 percent

1-23 previously released.

24. Do you consider yourself a fan of college sports, or not?

	Yes	No	No opinion
3/2/14	56	44	*

25. Do you support or oppose allowing college athletes to form a union, like the professional sports unions, to negotiate their rights and working conditions?

	Support	Oppose	No opinion
3/2/14	47	47	6

26. Beyond any scholarships they receive, do you support or oppose paying salaries to college athletes? Do you feel that way strongly or somewhat?

	----- Support -----			----- Oppose -----			No
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	opinion
3/2/14	33	19	15	64	17	47	3

*** END ***