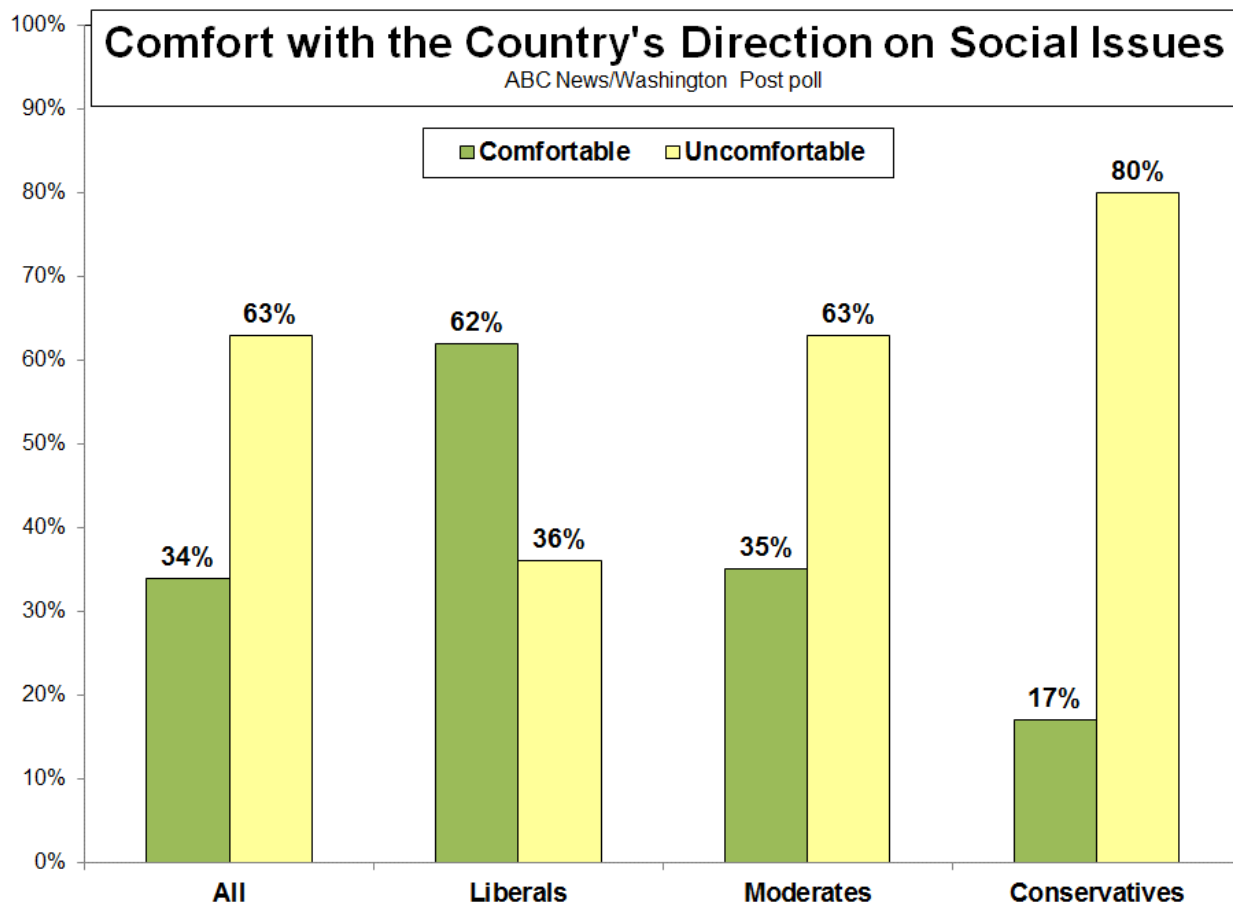


Discomfort with Social Directions Marks a Charged Political Landscape

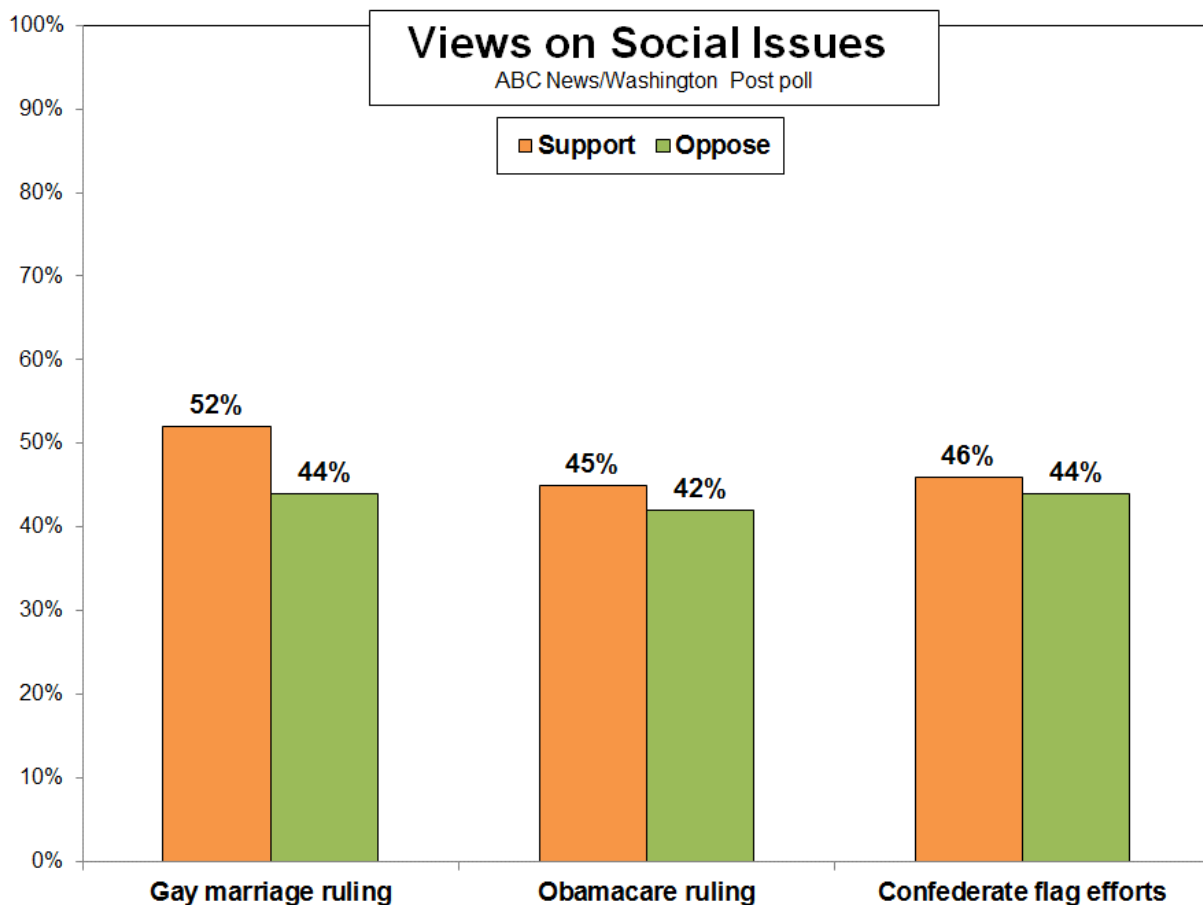
Americans by a wide margin express discomfort with the country's direction on social issues, a potentially potent force in political preferences.

Just 34 percent in the latest ABC News/Washington Post poll say they're comfortable with the country's social direction, while 63 percent are uncomfortable. Indeed more than four in 10 are "strongly" uncomfortable, three times as many as are strongly comfortable with the changes occurring.

Ideological and partisan divisions largely align with that discomfort. It's highest by far among conservatives and Republicans, but also substantial in centrist groups, i.e., moderates and independents. Liberals and Democrats are much more comfortable with the country's social direction – but not universally so by any means.



Some issues are particularly divisive. This poll, produced for ABC by [Langer Research Associates](#), finds that the public splits almost evenly on the Supreme Court's decision to uphold a key portion of Obamacare, 45-42 percent, support-oppose, and on efforts to ban displaying the Confederate flag on government property, 46-44 percent. And while 52 percent support the high court's ruling upholding the right of gays and lesbians to marry, 44 percent are opposed. (Allowing gays to marry is more popular in general than is the court's ruling.)



There, of course, are other issues afoot, ranging, for instance, from debates over police treatment of minorities to immigration policy to the relaxation of marijuana laws. And individual issues may play out differently, some preferred by one side of the political spectrum, some by the other.

Regardless, the broader discomfort underscores today's charged political landscape – and may have policy and political impacts alike.

For instance, the view that the country's headed in the right direction overall – closely associated with comfort about social changes, as well as with economic sentiment – has declined by 8 percentage points since January, to just 31 percent; instead 65 percent say the country's seriously off on the wrong track, up by 9 points.

And politically, much of Barack Obama's approval rating and Hillary Clinton's support in the 2016 presidential contest comes from people who express comfort with the country's direction on social issues. If discomfort advances, both may be at some risk.

Specifically, among people who are comfortable with the country's overall direction on social issues, 76 percent approve of Obama's performance as president – a logical result, since he's at the helm. Among those who are uncomfortable, approval of Obama plummets to 28 percent.

Similarly, in a hypothetical matchup against Jeb Bush, Clinton gets 75 percent support from registered voters who are comfortable with the country's social direction, more than twice her level of support from those who are uncomfortable. Bush, in contrast, does better with the larger group of registered voters who are uncomfortable, rather than those who are comfortable, by 57-21 percent.

There are countervailing attitudes. In one, Americans by a broad 68-27 percent say the country's economic system favors the wealthy rather than treating most Americans fairly. And this issue works for Clinton. She leads Bush by 2-1, 62-31 percent, among those who see the economic system as unfair, while he leads by 67-27 percent among those who see it as mostly fair.

GROUPS – Comfort with the country's social direction peaks at 62 percent among liberals and 54 percent among Democrats – hardly overwhelming majorities in either case. Feeling uncomfortable, by contrast, garners far higher numbers in other groups, including 82 percent of Republicans, 80 percent of conservatives and 82 percent of evangelical white Protestants, a core conservative Republican group.

Moreover, as noted, discomfort also is substantial in centrist groups – 68 percent among political independents and 63 percent among moderates. It's 69 percent among whites, compared with 51 percent among nonwhites.

	Views on the country's direction on social issues	
	Comfortable	Uncomfortable
All	34%	63
Democrats	54	43
Independents	31	68
Republicans	16	82
Liberals	62	36
Moderates	35	63
Conservatives	17	80
Whites	28	69
Nonwhites	46	51

Issues covered in this survey also delineate comfort with society's direction. Discomfort reaches 82 percent among those who think that immigrants weaken rather than strengthen U.S. society, 80 percent among critics of the Supreme Court's Obamacare ruling, 79 percent among opponents

of its ruling on gay marriage, and 77 percent among opponents of efforts to restrict the Confederate flag.

Notably, comfort with the country's direction is not commensurately high among people on the opposite sides of these issues. It's just 46 percent among those who think that immigrants strengthen U.S. society, 47 percent among those who support efforts to ban the Confederate flag from government property, 48 percent among those who support the gay marriage ruling and 55 percent among those who back the Obamacare ruling.

Views on the country's direction on social issues:		
	Comfortable	Uncomfortable
All	34%	63
Immigrants		
Strengthen society	46	52
Weaken society	17	82
Gay marriage ruling		
Support	48	50
Oppose	18	79
Obamacare ruling		
Support	55	44
Oppose	17	80
Restrictions on Confederate flag		
Support	47	50
Oppose	22	76

There are divisions among groups on individual issues, as well. Beyond the expected partisan and ideological splits, for example, young adults are far more apt to favor the Supreme Court ruling on gay marriage (70 percent) than those age 40 and older (44 percent). And minorities, especially blacks, are far more supportive than whites of the ruling on Obamacare. (At the same time, blacks have a more muted view on efforts to restrict the Confederate flag – 54 percent support.)

Views on society's direction overall relate to underlying predispositions; liberals tend to be more receptive to change, conservatives more skeptical of it. At a time of substantial and often divisive change across a range of social issues, these results suggest that public comfort – or discomfort – may be a key measure in the next presidential election, and beyond.

METHODOLOGY – This ABC News/Washington Post poll was conducted by landline and cellular telephone July 16-19, 2015, in English and Spanish, among a random national sample of 1,002 adults. Results have a margin of [sampling error](#) of 3.5 points for the full sample, including design effect. Partisan divisions are 30-21-39 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>.

Media contacts: [Van Scott](#), (212) 456-7243, or [Julie Townsend](#), (212) 456-4934.

Full results follow.

* in data columns = less than 0.5 percent

1-2, 4-16, 21-27 previously released or held for release.

3. Do you think things in this country (are generally going in the right direction) or do you feel things (have gotten pretty seriously off on the wrong track)?

	Right direction	Wrong track	No opinion
7/19/15	31	65	4
1/15/15	39	56	5
10/26/14	28	68	5
10/12/14	29	66	5
9/7/14	31	65	5
4/27/14	30	66	4
1/23/14	35	62	2
11/17/13	27	70	3
10/20/13	28	68	4
7/21/13	36	60	4
5/19/13	39	57	4
1/13/13	39	57	5
Call for full trend			

Switching topics,

17. Do you think the U.S. economic system (generally favors the wealthy) or (is fair to most Americans)?

	Favors the wealthy	Is fair to most Americans	No opinion
7/19/15	68	27	4
10/26/14	71	24	5

18. Who do you think has better ideas about how to make the economic system more fair than it is now - the (Democratic Party) or the (Republican Party)?

	Democratic Party	Republican Party	Both equally (vol.)	Neither (vol.)	No opinion
7/19/15	42	39	2	11	6

19. Would you describe yourself as comfortable or uncomfortable with the country's overall direction on social issues these days? Do you feel that way strongly or somewhat?

	NET	Comfortable Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Uncomfortable Somewhat	Strongly	No opinion
7/19/15	34	14	21	63	21	42	2

20. Do you support or oppose [ITEM]? Do you feel that way strongly or somewhat?

7/19/15 - Summary Table

	-----	Support	-----	-----	Oppose	-----	No
	NET	Strongly	Smwt	NET	Smwt	Strongly	op.
a. The U.S. Supreme Court ruling legalizing gay marriage	52	37	15	44	10	35	4
b. The U.S. Supreme Court ruling upholding a key part of the federal health care law	45	27	19	42	13	28	13
c. Efforts to ban displays of the Confederate flag on government property	46	33	13	44	13	31	10

END