

Especially among the Young and Poor GOP Makes Big Gains among White Voters

As the country enters into the 2012 presidential election cycle, the electorate's partisan affiliations have shifted significantly since Barack Obama won office nearly three years ago. In particular, the Democrats hold a much narrower edge than they did in 2008, particularly when the partisan leanings of independents are taken into account.

Notably, the GOP gains have occurred only among white voters; a 2-point Republican edge among whites in 2008 (46% to 44%) has widened to a 13-point lead today (52% to 39%). In sharp contrast, the partisan attachments of black and Hispanic voters have remained consistently Democratic.

While Republican gains in leaned party identification span nearly all subgroups of whites, they are particularly pronounced among the young and poor. A seven-point Democratic advantage among whites under age 30 three years ago has turned into an 11-point GOP advantage today. And a 15-point Democratic advantage among whites earning less than \$30,000 annually has swung to a slim four-point Republican edge today.

Yet, the Republican Party's growth has been limited in two important ways. First, the steep gains in GOP leaning that helped the party in the 2010 midterms have not continued, as the overall balance of partisan attachments has held steady in the first half of 2011. Second, while more independents say they "lean" toward the Republican Party, the GOP has not gained in actual party affiliation since 2008 – just 28% of registered voters, in both years, call themselves Republicans. Instead, the growth category continues to be political independents, with a record high 34% of registered voters choosing this label in 2011.

GOP Gains Among Whites, Particularly Young and Low Income

| | 2008 | | 2011 | | Rep gain |
|---------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------|
| | Rep/ In Rep | Dem/ In Dem | Rep/ In Rep | Dem/ In Dem | |
| | % | % | % | % | |
| All voters | 39 | 51 | 43 | 47 | +4 |
| White | 46 | 44 | 52 | 39 | +6 |
| Black | 6 | 88 | 8 | 86 | +2 |
| Hispanic | 28 | 66 | 22 | 64 | -6 |
| <i>Among whites</i> | | | | | |
| 18-29 | 42 | 49 | 52 | 41 | +10 |
| 30-49 | 49 | 42 | 55 | 36 | +6 |
| 50-64 | 45 | 45 | 50 | 41 | +5 |
| 65+ | 46 | 44 | 51 | 39 | +5 |
| \$75k+ | 52 | 41 | 54 | 40 | +2 |
| \$30-75k | 47 | 46 | 54 | 38 | +7 |
| <\$30k | 37 | 52 | 47 | 43 | +10 |

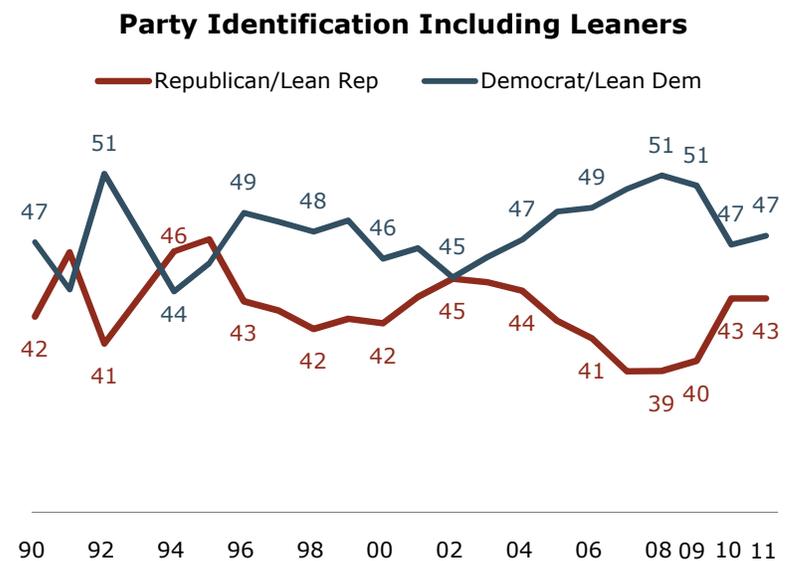
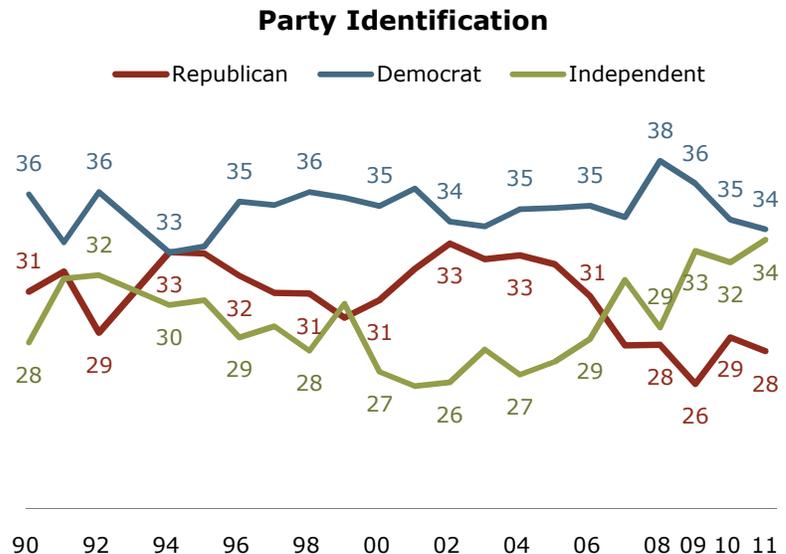
PEW RESEARCH CENTER. Based on all registered voters interviewed in each year. Figures read across, with the percent not identifying with or leaning to either party not shown.

Tracking Party Identification and Party Leaning

Analysis of the overall balance of partisan identification in all Pew Research Center polling conducted in each year – updated with data from the first six months of 2011 – finds that as the number of Democrats has fallen from a quarter-century high in 2008, the number of self-proclaimed independents has continued to grow. As a result, there are now as many independent voters as Democrats (34% each) – the first time this has occurred in more than two decades of Pew Research Center surveys, and, by all indications, the highest percent independent since party identification was first measured in the late 1930s.

While the number identifying as Republicans has remained relatively flat (28% in both 2008 and 2011), more independent voters lean to the GOP than did so in 2008 (16% now, 11% then). When leaners are combined with partisans, Democrats only have a four-point advantage among registered voters – 47% of voters are Democrats or lean to the Democratic Party while 43% are Republicans or lean to the GOP. In 2008, Democrats held a 12 point advantage over Republicans

Changes in Party Identification 1990-2011



PEW RESEARCH CENTER. Based on registered voters. Figures add to less than 100% because some do not identify as Republican, Democrat or independent or do not lean to either party. Figures for 2011 are based on polls conducted January through June with 8,546 registered voters. Figures for other years are based on all polls conducted in that year.

(51% to 39%).

Most of this shift in the balance of partisan attachment occurred prior to this year. The sharp gains in Republican leanings between 2009 and 2010 have not continued into the first half of 2011. [[See detailed table at back of report for a full demographic breakdown of party identification in 2008, 2009, 2010 and 2011.](#)]

Republicans have made sizable gains among white voters since 2008. Currently, 52% of white voters either identify as Republicans or lean to the GOP, compared with 39% who affiliate with the Democratic Party or lean Democratic. In 2008, Republicans held only a two-point lead among white voters (46% to 44%).

There has been no change in party identification among African American or Hispanic voters. Large majorities of African American (86%) and Hispanic voters (64%) continue to identify as Democrats or lean Democratic.

The Democratic Party's advantage among young voters has declined from 28 points in 2008 to 13 in the first half of 2011. The

Democrats' Advantage over Republicans Narrows

| | 2008 | | | 2011 | | |
|--------------------|----------------|----------------|--------|----------------|----------------|--------|
| | Rep/ In Rep | Dem/ In Dem | Margin | Rep/ In Rep | Dem/ In Dem | Margin |
| | % | % | | % | % | |
| All voters | 39 | 51 | D+12 | 43 | 47 | D+4 |
| Men | 44 | 46 | D+2 | 47 | 43 | R+4 |
| Women | 35 | 56 | D+21 | 40 | 52 | D+12 |
| White | 46 | 44 | R+2 | 52 | 39 | R+13 |
| Black | 6 | 88 | D+82 | 8 | 86 | D+78 |
| Hispanic | 28 | 66 | D+38 | 22 | 64 | D+42 |
| 18-29 | 32 | 60 | D+28 | 39 | 52 | D+13 |
| 30-49 | 41 | 50 | D+9 | 44 | 47 | D+3 |
| 50-64 | 40 | 51 | D+11 | 43 | 48 | D+5 |
| 65+ | 41 | 49 | D+8 | 47 | 45 | R+2 |
| College grad+ | 41 | 51 | D+10 | 44 | 48 | D+4 |
| Some college | 40 | 50 | D+10 | 46 | 45 | R+1 |
| HS or less | 37 | 53 | D+16 | 41 | 49 | D+8 |
| \$75,000 or more | 47 | 46 | R+1 | 49 | 44 | R+5 |
| \$30,000-\$74,999 | 40 | 52 | D+12 | 46 | 46 | Even |
| Less than \$30,000 | 28 | 62 | D+34 | 34 | 56 | D+22 |
| Northeast | 34 | 55 | D+21 | 37 | 53 | D+16 |
| Midwest | 38 | 51 | D+13 | 46 | 45 | R+1 |
| South | 42 | 48 | D+6 | 45 | 47 | D+2 |
| West | 38 | 53 | D+15 | 43 | 46 | D+3 |

PEW RESEARCH CENTER. Based on registered voters. Figures read across, with the percent not identifying with or leaning to either party not shown. Figures for 2011 are based on polls conducted January through June (N=8,546). Figures for 2008 are based on all polls conducted in that year (N=27,395). Whites and blacks are non-Hispanic; Hispanics are of any race and are reported only when polls were conducted in both English and Spanish.

Democrats' edge among voters ages 30 to 64 also has narrowed (from 10 points to three points). And Republicans now hold a two-point lead among voters 65 and older (47% to 45%); Democrats held an eight-point lead among seniors in 2008 (49% to 41%).

Republicans also have made gains among both men and women. In surveys conducted through June, Republicans have a four-point advantage among men (47% to 43%) and trail by 12 points among women (52% to 40%). In 2008, Democrats held a two-point edge among men and a 21-point advantage among women

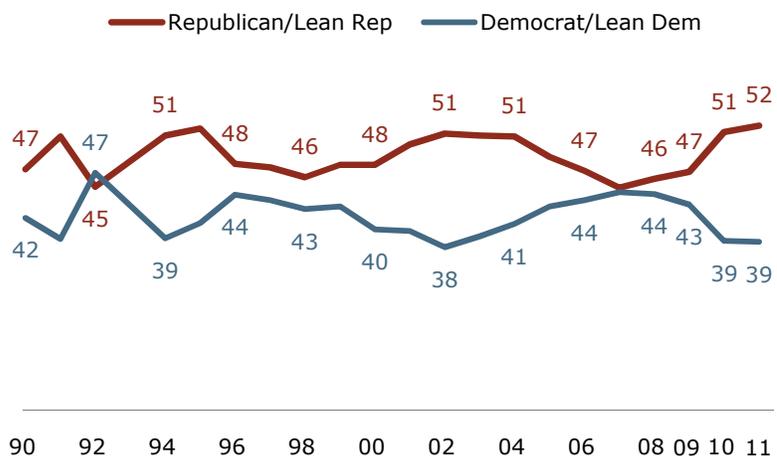
Republican gains have been substantial among voters with family incomes under \$75,000. Notably, Democrats held a 12-point advantage among middle income voters (\$30,000-\$74,999) in 2008, but now as many identify with the Republican Party as with the Democratic Party. Democrats continue to maintain their advantage among lower income voters, but it is smaller now than in 2008.

GOP Gains among Young White Voters

The Republican Party's wide lead among white voters is not unprecedented. The current 12-point advantage in leaned party affiliation among whites is on par with the GOP's lead among whites from 2002-2004 and in 1994. And as with the national trend, there has been virtually no shift in partisanship among whites from 2010 to the first half of 2011.

Unlike 2008, Republicans now have the advantage across virtually all groups of white voters. Most notably, Republicans now have an 11-point lead over Democrats (52% to 41%) among whites under the age of 30. In 2008, Democrats held a seven-point edge among this group (49% to 42%).

Party Identification among White Voters



PEW RESEARCH CENTER. Based on white non-Hispanic registered voters. Figures add to less than 100% because some do not identify with or lean to either party. Figures for 2011 are based on polls conducted January through June. Figures for other years are based on all polls conducted in that year.

While the GOP's gains have been particularly evident among young whites, they have picked up support across all age groups as well. Among white voters ages 30 to 49, the Republican lead over Democrats has grown from seven points to 19 points. Among voters ages 50 to 64, who were evenly split in 2008, Republicans now have a nine-point advantage. The GOP' had a slight 2-point edge among white voters 65 and older three years ago; that has increased to 12 points in the first half of 2011.

Republicans also have widened their advantage among white men from 11 points in 2008 to 21 points now. Republicans now have a five-point lead among white women; in 2008 Democrats had a seven-point lead over Republicans among white women voters.

Democrats have lost their edge among lower income white voters. In 2008, Democrats had a 15 point lead among white voters with family incomes less than \$30,000. Republicans now have a four-point edge among this group. The GOP's lead among middle income white voters also has grown since 2008, and Republicans maintain a substantial advantage with higher income white voters.

Republicans Make Substantial Gains Among Young and Low-Income Whites

| | 2008 | | | 2011 | | |
|-----------------------------|----------------|----------------|--------|----------------|----------------|--------|
| | Rep/ In Rep | Dem/ In Dem | Margin | Rep/ In Rep | Dem/ In Dem | Margin |
| | % | % | | % | % | |
| All whites | 46 | 44 | R+2 | 52 | 39 | R+13 |
| Men | 51 | 40 | R+11 | 56 | 35 | R+21 |
| Women | 42 | 49 | D+7 | 48 | 43 | R+5 |
| 18-29 | 42 | 49 | D+7 | 52 | 41 | R+11 |
| 30-49 | 49 | 42 | R+7 | 55 | 36 | R+19 |
| 50-64 | 45 | 45 | Even | 50 | 41 | R+9 |
| 65+ | 46 | 44 | R+2 | 51 | 39 | R+12 |
| College grad+ | 46 | 47 | D+1 | 50 | 43 | R+7 |
| Some college | 48 | 43 | R+5 | 54 | 38 | R+16 |
| HS or less | 45 | 44 | R+1 | 53 | 36 | R+17 |
| \$75,000 or more | 52 | 41 | R+11 | 54 | 40 | R+14 |
| \$30,000-\$74,999 | 47 | 46 | R+1 | 54 | 38 | R+16 |
| Less than \$30,000 | 37 | 52 | D+15 | 47 | 43 | R+4 |
| Northeast | 39 | 51 | D+12 | 44 | 45 | D+1 |
| Midwest | 43 | 46 | D+3 | 52 | 38 | R+14 |
| South | 53 | 38 | R+15 | 57 | 35 | R+22 |
| West | 45 | 47 | D+2 | 50 | 41 | R+9 |
| <i>Religious preference</i> | | | | | | |
| White Protestant | 55 | 36 | R+19 | 60 | 32 | R+28 |
| White evangelical | 65 | 28 | R+37 | 71 | 23 | R+48 |
| White mainline | 45 | 45 | Even | 49 | 40 | R+9 |
| White Catholic | 41 | 49 | D+8 | 50 | 40 | R+10 |

PEW RESEARCH CENTER. Based on white non-Hispanic registered voters. Figures read across, with the percent not identifying with or leaning to either party not shown. Figures for 2011 are based on polls conducted January through June. Figures for 2008 are based on all polls conducted in that year.

Republicans have made gains among whites with a high school education or less. The GOP's advantage over Democrats has grown from one point in 2008 to 17 points in 2011

among less educated whites. Republicans have made smaller gains among whites voters who have college degrees.

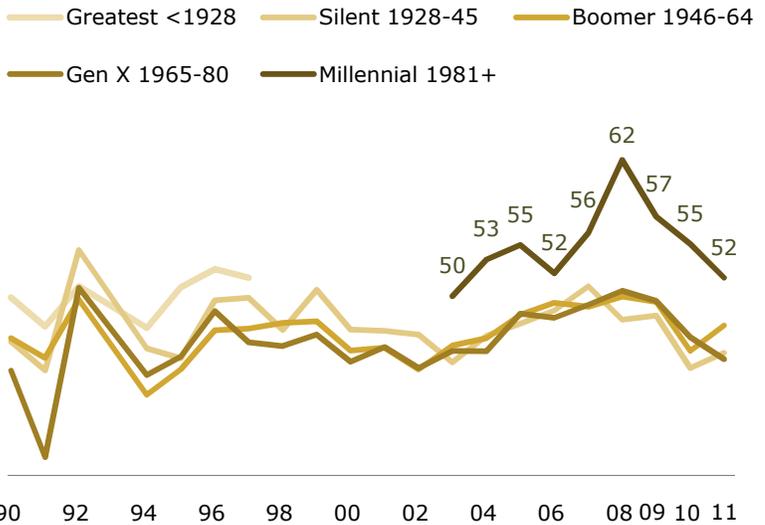
Generations: Fewer Millennials Leaning Democratic

The Millennial generation – those born after 1980 – were a topic of much discussion in the 2008 election. These young voters – the oldest turned 27 that year, and are turning 30 now – leaned Democratic by roughly two-to-one in the 2008 election, and their commitment to Barack Obama, and relatively high voter turnout, was a substantial factor in the election’s outcome.

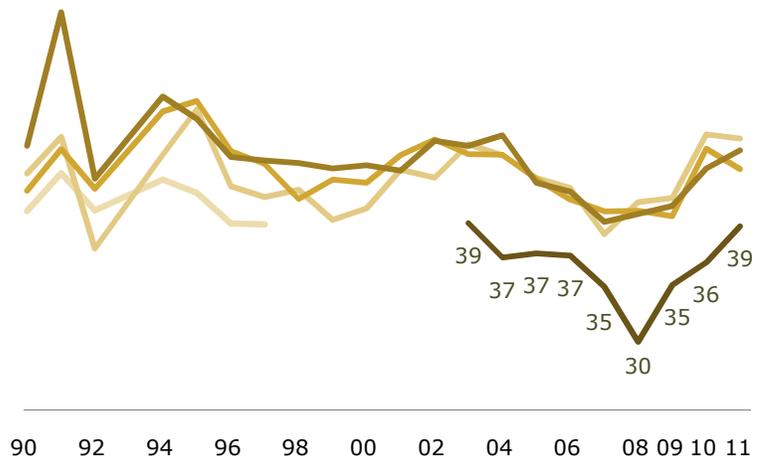
While these voters remain the most Democratically oriented generation today, the advantage has narrowed substantially since 2008. Currently, 52% of Millennial voters are Democrats or lean to the Democratic Party while 39% are Republicans or lean to the GOP. This 13-point edge is less than half the size of the 32-point edge Democrats held three years ago.

Among voters in other generations, Democrats have lost adherents while

Generations and Party Identification
Democrat/Lean Democratic



Republican/Lean Republican



PEW RESEARCH CENTER. Based on registered voters. Figures for 2011 are based on polls conducted January through June. Figures for 2008 are based on all polls conducted in that year.

Republicans have gained. But these changes have not been as large as those among Millennials.

ABOUT THE PARTY IDENTIFICATION DATABASE

The analysis of changes in party identification over time is based on a compilation of 223 surveys and about 300,000 interviews among registered voters conducted by the Pew Research Center from January 1990 to June 2011. These surveys are combined into one large data file that can be sorted according to a range of demographic characteristics, with comparisons made across different time periods. Yearly totals are calculated by combining all surveys for the calendar year, with appropriate weights applied. The table below shows the number of surveys and interviews conducted each year as well as the margin of error for each yearly sample.

| Year | Number of Surveys | Sample Size | Margin of Error |
|-------------|--------------------------|--------------------|------------------------|
| 1990 | 3 | 4,233 | 2.0 |
| 1991 | 5 | 6,007 | 2.0 |
| 1992 | 7 | 8,207 | 1.5 |
| 1993 | -- | -- | -- |
| 1994 | 6 | 7,696 | 1.5 |
| 1995 | 4 | 5,079 | 2.0 |
| 1996 | 10 | 12,926 | 1.5 |
| 1997 | 9 | 8,907 | 1.5 |
| 1998 | 13 | 15,223 | 1.0 |
| 1999 | 10 | 11,102 | 1.5 |
| 2000 | 16 | 23,517 | 1.0 |
| 2001 | 10 | 9,985 | 1.5 |
| 2002 | 12 | 15,825 | 1.0 |
| 2003 | 12 | 11,658 | 1.5 |
| 2004 | 17 | 23,572 | 1.0 |
| 2005 | 13 | 17,916 | 1.0 |
| 2006 | 15 | 22,219 | 1.0 |
| 2007 | 12 | 16,881 | 1.0 |
| 2008 | 16 | 27,395 | 1.0 |
| 2009 | 13 | 18,469 | 1.0 |
| 2010 | 13 | 22,555 | 1.0 |
| 2011 | 7 | 8,546 | 1.5 |

TABLE: PARTY IDENTIFICATION WITH LEANERS

| | 2008 | | | 2009 | | | 2010 | | | 2011 | | | 2011 |
|-----------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|------------|---------------------|---------------------|------------|---------------------|---------------------|------------|---------------------|---------------------|------------|------|
| | Rep/ lean R % | Dem/ lean D % | R-D gap | N |
| ALL VOTERS | 39 | 51 | D+12 | 40 | 51 | D+11 | 43 | 47 | D+4 | 43 | 47 | D+4 | 8546 |
| SEX | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Men | 44 | 46 | D+2 | 44 | 45 | D+1 | 48 | 42 | R+6 | 47 | 43 | R+4 | 3865 |
| Women | 35 | 56 | D+21 | 36 | 55 | D+19 | 40 | 51 | D+11 | 40 | 52 | D+12 | 4681 |
| AGE | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 18-49 | 38 | 53 | D+15 | 39 | 51 | D+12 | 42 | 49 | D+7 | 42 | 48 | D+6 | 3067 |
| 50+ | 40 | 50 | D+10 | 40 | 50 | D+10 | 45 | 46 | D+1 | 45 | 47 | D+2 | 5347 |
| DETAILED AGE | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 18-29 | 32 | 60 | D+28 | 34 | 57 | D+23 | 36 | 55 | D+19 | 39 | 52 | D+13 | 815 |
| 30-49 | 41 | 50 | D+9 | 42 | 48 | D+6 | 45 | 46 | D+1 | 44 | 47 | D+3 | 2252 |
| 50-64 | 40 | 51 | D+11 | 39 | 51 | D+12 | 44 | 47 | D+3 | 43 | 48 | D+5 | 2931 |
| 65+ | 41 | 49 | D+8 | 41 | 49 | D+8 | 46 | 44 | R+2 | 47 | 45 | R+2 | 2416 |
| SEX BY AGE | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Men 18-49 | 43 | 48 | D+5 | 43 | 46 | D+3 | 47 | 43 | R+4 | 45 | 43 | R+2 | 1509 |
| Men 50+ | 45 | 45 | Even | 44 | 45 | D+1 | 48 | 41 | R+7 | 49 | 42 | R+7 | 2314 |
| Women 18-49 | 34 | 58 | D+24 | 36 | 56 | D+20 | 38 | 54 | D+16 | 40 | 53 | D+13 | 1558 |
| Women 50+ | 36 | 54 | D+18 | 36 | 54 | D+18 | 42 | 49 | D+7 | 41 | 51 | D+10 | 3033 |
| RACE | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| White, non-Hispanic | 46 | 44 | R+2 | 47 | 43 | R+4 | 51 | 39 | R+12 | 52 | 39 | R+13 | 6658 |
| Black, non-Hispanic | 6 | 88 | D+82 | 8 | 86 | D+78 | 7 | 86 | D+79 | 8 | 86 | D+78 | 850 |
| Hispanic* | 28 | 66 | D+38 | 25 | 66 | D+41 | 29 | 63 | D+34 | 22 | 64 | D+42 | 380 |
| EDUCATION | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| College grad+ | 41 | 51 | D+10 | 42 | 50 | D+8 | 45 | 47 | D+2 | 44 | 48 | D+4 | 3596 |
| Some college | 40 | 50 | D+10 | 41 | 49 | D+8 | 46 | 45 | R+1 | 46 | 45 | R+1 | 2285 |
| HS or less | 37 | 53 | D+16 | 37 | 52 | D+15 | 41 | 48 | D+7 | 41 | 49 | D+8 | 2643 |
| INCOME | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| \$75,000+ | 47 | 46 | R+1 | 47 | 46 | R+1 | 51 | 42 | R+9 | 49 | 44 | R+5 | 2561 |
| \$30,000-\$74,999 | 40 | 52 | D+12 | 40 | 51 | D+11 | 45 | 47 | D+2 | 46 | 46 | Even | 2891 |
| <\$30,000 | 28 | 62 | D+34 | 30 | 59 | D+29 | 32 | 58 | D+26 | 34 | 56 | D+22 | 2012 |
| RELIGIOUS PREFERENCE | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Total Protestant | 45 | 46 | D+1 | 45 | 46 | D+1 | 50 | 42 | R+8 | 50 | 42 | R+8 | 4712 |
| White evangelical Prot. | 65 | 28 | R+37 | 63 | 28 | R+35 | 69 | 23 | R+46 | 71 | 23 | R+48 | 1837 |
| White mainline Prot. | 45 | 45 | Even | 45 | 45 | Even | 50 | 40 | R+10 | 49 | 40 | R+9 | 1825 |
| Black Protestant | 5 | 89 | D+84 | 7 | 87 | D+80 | 7 | 88 | D+81 | 7 | 87 | D+80 | 666 |
| Total Catholic | 37 | 53 | D+16 | 40 | 52 | D+12 | 43 | 48 | D+5 | 42 | 48 | D+6 | 1857 |
| White Catholic | 41 | 49 | D+8 | 45 | 46 | D+1 | 50 | 41 | R+9 | 50 | 40 | R+10 | 1451 |
| Jewish | 20 | 72 | D+52 | 25 | 66 | D+41 | 31 | 63 | D+32 | 32 | 61 | D+29 | 188 |
| Unaffiliated | 25 | 64 | D+39 | 25 | 63 | D+38 | 29 | 58 | D+29 | 27 | 62 | D+35 | 1256 |
| REGION | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Northeast | 34 | 55 | D+21 | 36 | 55 | D+19 | 39 | 51 | D+12 | 37 | 53 | D+16 | 1584 |
| Midwest | 38 | 51 | D+13 | 39 | 50 | D+11 | 43 | 46 | D+3 | 46 | 45 | R+1 | 2293 |
| South | 42 | 48 | D+6 | 42 | 49 | D+7 | 46 | 45 | R+1 | 45 | 47 | D+2 | 3147 |
| West | 38 | 53 | D+15 | 39 | 51 | D+12 | 43 | 47 | D+4 | 43 | 46 | D+3 | 1522 |
| WHITES | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Men | 51 | 40 | R+11 | 51 | 38 | R+13 | 55 | 34 | R+21 | 56 | 35 | R+21 | 2959 |
| Women | 42 | 49 | D+7 | 43 | 48 | D+5 | 48 | 43 | R+5 | 48 | 43 | R+5 | 3699 |
| 18-29 | 42 | 49 | D+7 | 44 | 47 | D+3 | 46 | 45 | R+1 | 52 | 41 | R+11 | 526 |
| 30-49 | 49 | 42 | R+7 | 50 | 40 | R+10 | 54 | 37 | R+17 | 55 | 36 | R+19 | 1615 |
| 50-64 | 45 | 45 | Even | 45 | 45 | Even | 51 | 40 | R+11 | 50 | 41 | R+9 | 2346 |
| 65+ | 46 | 44 | R+2 | 46 | 44 | R+2 | 52 | 38 | R+14 | 51 | 39 | R+12 | 2083 |
| College grad+ | 46 | 47 | D+1 | 47 | 45 | R+2 | 51 | 42 | R+9 | 50 | 43 | R+7 | 2938 |
| Some college | 48 | 43 | R+5 | 50 | 41 | R+9 | 54 | 37 | R+17 | 54 | 38 | R+16 | 1757 |
| HS or less | 45 | 44 | R+1 | 45 | 43 | R+2 | 50 | 38 | R+12 | 53 | 36 | R+17 | 1952 |
| \$75,000+ | 52 | 41 | R+11 | 53 | 41 | R+12 | 56 | 38 | R+18 | 54 | 40 | R+14 | 2122 |
| \$30,000-\$74,999 | 47 | 46 | R+1 | 48 | 43 | R+5 | 53 | 39 | R+14 | 54 | 38 | R+16 | 2289 |
| <\$30,000 | 37 | 52 | D+15 | 38 | 50 | D+12 | 43 | 46 | D+3 | 47 | 43 | R+4 | 1373 |
| Northeast | 39 | 51 | D+12 | 41 | 49 | D+8 | 46 | 44 | R+2 | 44 | 45 | D+1 | 1272 |
| Midwest | 43 | 46 | D+3 | 44 | 45 | D+1 | 48 | 41 | R+7 | 52 | 38 | R+14 | 1933 |
| South | 53 | 38 | R+15 | 53 | 38 | R+15 | 58 | 33 | R+25 | 57 | 35 | R+22 | 2293 |
| West | 45 | 47 | D+2 | 46 | 45 | R+1 | 49 | 41 | R+8 | 50 | 41 | R+9 | 1160 |

Whites and blacks include only those who are non-Hispanic; Hispanics are of any race. Hispanics reported only for polls conducted in both English and Spanish.