



# University of Maryland Critical Issues Poll *with Nielsen Scarborough*

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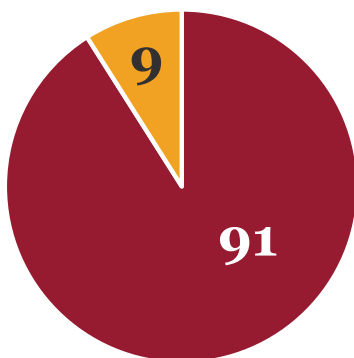
Study Series No. 1

## Making Sense of a Historic Election

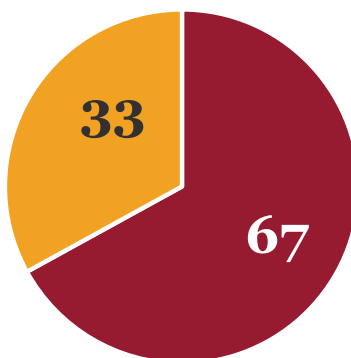
*Examining political trends and attitudes in Trump's America*

**How much did you want your vote to send a message to  
the political establishment? (Among voters)**

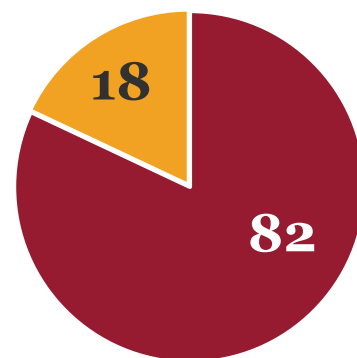
**Republicans**



**Democrats**



**Independents**



■ A great deal/Some ■ A little/Not at all

### Principal Investigators

**Shibley Telhami**

Director of the University of  
Maryland Critical Issues Poll; Anwar  
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for the Anwar Sadat Chair for Peace and Development

# Principal Investigators

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**Shibley Telhami** is the Anwar Sadat Professor for Peace and Development and the Director of the University of Maryland Critical Issues Poll. He is also a nonresident senior fellow at the Brookings Institution. His best-selling book, *The Stakes: America and the Middle East*, was selected by Foreign Affairs as one of the top five books on the Middle East in 2003. His two most recent books are [\*The World Through Arab Eyes: Arab Public Opinion and the Reshaping of the Middle East\*](#) and [\*The Peace Puzzle, America's Quest for Arab-Israeli Peace, 1989-2011\*](#), which were both published in 2013. Telhami was selected by the Carnegie Corporation of New York along with the *New York Times* as one of the "Great Immigrants" for 2013.



**Stella Rouse** is an associate professor in the Department of Government and Politics and director of the Center for American Politics and Citizenship. She earned her Ph.D. from Louisiana State University in 2008. Rouse's book, [\*Latinos in the Legislative Process: Interests and Influence\*](#), published by

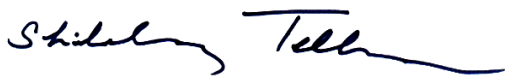
Cambridge University Press, was named by Huffington Post as one of the [\*"Best Political Science Books of 2013."\*](#) She is a native of Colombia. When she was two years old, her parents immigrated to Ft. Lauderdale, Florida where she grew up. Rouse fluently speaks, reads, and writes Spanish. Her areas of interest are Latino Politics, minority politics, legislative and political behavior, state politics, immigration, and Millennials.

## ***Note from Principal Investigators***

In the aftermath of one of the most divisive presidential elections in recent American history, scholars and political pundits alike have sought to understand the ways in which Americans formulate their attitudes on political issues and interact with their government. At the University of Maryland (UMD), we have been researching the ways in which ordinary citizens respond to the extraordinary events that occur in the United States and abroad. To further enhance research in this area, the Anwar Sadat Chair for Peace and Development teamed up with the Center for American Politics and Citizenship (CAPC) at UMD to establish the [University of Maryland Critical Issues Poll](#); this effort was made possible by the generous support of the College of Behavioral and Social Sciences and the Department of Government and Politics. The Sadat Chair program has extensive public opinion polling experience on both domestic politics and foreign policy issues within the Arab World, United States, and Israel. CAPC has also been active in the arena of public opinion polling via their partnership with *The Washington Post* which produces the biannual Washington Post-University of Maryland Poll. The UMD Critical Issues Poll will conduct multiple surveys each year with the assistance of Nielsen Scarborough, a widely respected research company that conducts over 200,000 surveys across a variety of topics.

With the Critical Issues Poll, we seek to examine how Americans form their attitudes on a number of highly salient political topics, and how these attitudes shift in light of recent events. The Critical Issues Poll probes in-depth attitudes regarding both domestic and foreign policy, seeking in some cases to capture “gut reaction” responses on certain questions, while in other cases testing the types of messages Americans find most persuasive on a given issue. The survey also provides the opportunity for graduate students to collaborate with University faculty to generate new survey items and experiments to answer research questions important to the literature in American politics and international relations.

The report that follows is the first in a series of reports the UMD Critical Issues Poll will produce after each survey. We hope you find the data and analysis both interesting and helpful in understanding the political climate we see today.



**Shibley Telhami**  
Professor and Director of  
the Critical Issues Poll



**Stella Rouse**  
Associate Professor and  
Associate Director of the Critical  
Issues Poll

### **Critical Issues Poll Advisory Committee**

- **Steven Kull** – Senior Research Scholar and director of the Program for Public Consultation at the School of Public Policy
- **Michael Hanmer** – Associate Professor in the Department of Government and Politics; Research Director for the Center for American Politics and Citizenship
- **Frauke Kreuter** – Professor in the Joint Program in Survey Methodology

# Making Sense of a Historic Election

## *Were the polls wrong?*

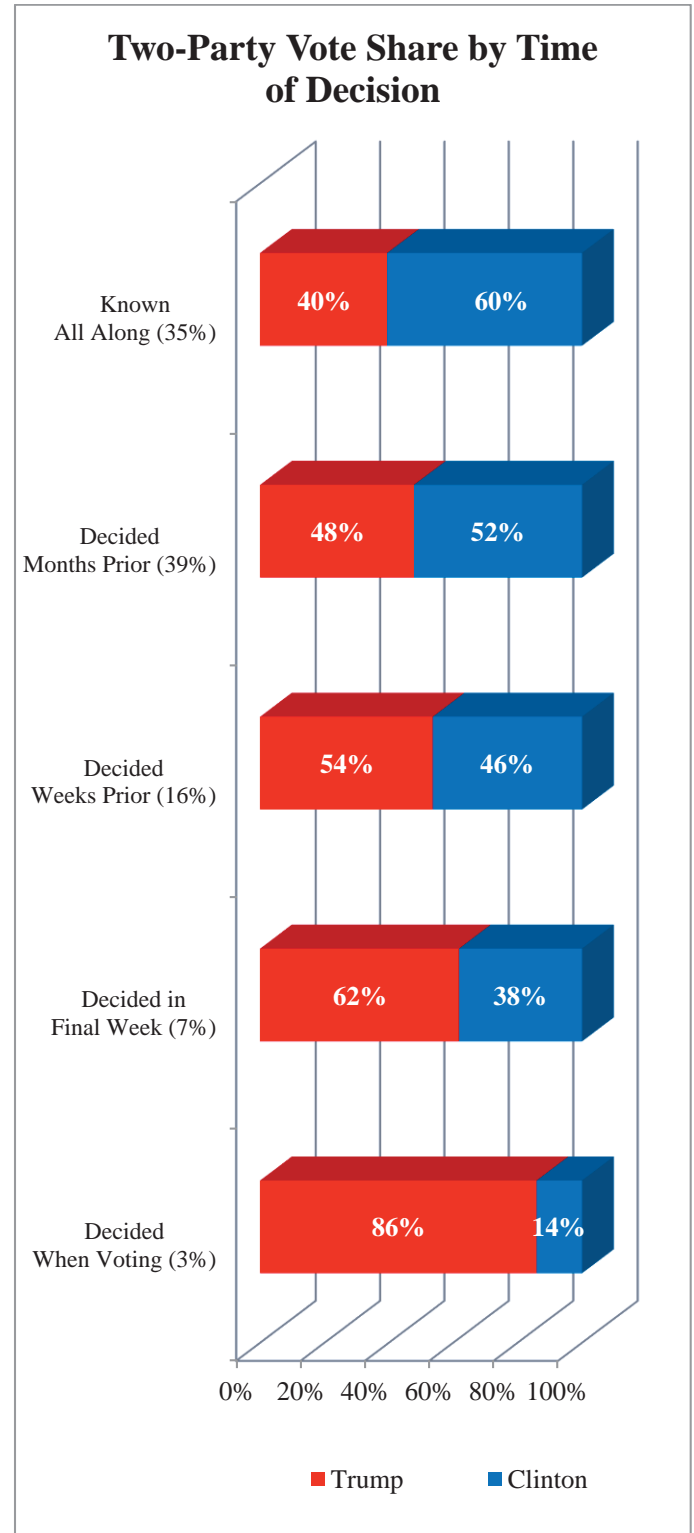
The conventional wisdom heading into Election Day suggested that Hillary Clinton would win, and very possibly win by an electoral landslide.

Among the most popular forecasts reported in the media, Clinton's chances of winning were estimated to be between 71% (from FiveThirtyEight.com) to over 99% (from the Princeton Election Consortium). These models largely reflected available polling data, which suggested Clinton was leading nationally by more than 3 percentage points, and by a good deal more than that in the months preceding the election (according to the RealClearPolitics.com average).

Was 2016 an example of poor sampling procedures? Was the claim that a "secret Trump vote" existed true and not being reflected in the polling data?

According to the data from The University of Maryland (UMD) Critical Issues Poll, what made the election so difficult to predict was the degree to which those individuals who decided late in the campaign swung their support to Donald Trump. Those who decided months or more out from the election supported Clinton by a seemingly overwhelming margin. Yet the roughly 26% of our sample who voted in the final weeks shifted strongly in favor of Donald Trump, including nearly 86% support for those who decided *at the ballot box*.

The evidence suggests that late-deciders may have been persuaded by last-minute news in the campaign such as FBI Director James Comey's decision to send a letter to members of Congress regarding Hillary Clinton's private email server.



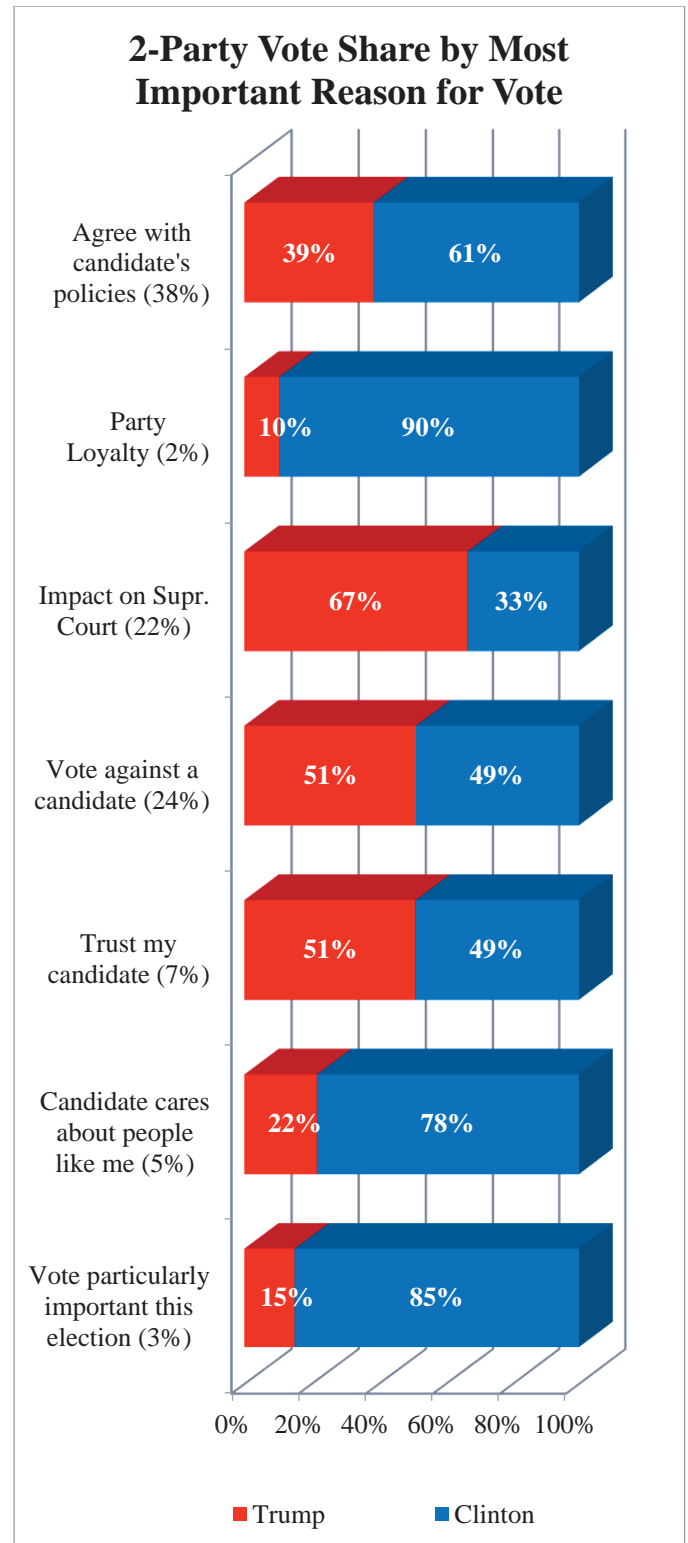
## *Policy agreement, the Supreme Court, and “sending a message” as motivators of vote choice*

Analysis from the UMD Critical Issues Poll further illuminates what drove support for Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton.

While many political pundits framed the election as a choice between the “[lesser of two evils](#),” we find that genuine agreement with the preferred candidate’s policies was the top choice among respondents. Among this group, Hillary Clinton was a clear favorite.

While almost a quarter of the sample said they were voting against a candidate rather than for their candidate, nearly as many people cited the likely impact the election would have on the Supreme Court as the single-most important reason for their vote. Among this key group, Donald Trump was the preferred candidate by a 2-to-1 margin.

Much has been made in the media in recent months about Republican voters “[coming home](#)” to the party after spending much of 2016 undecided about whether to support Donald Trump. Indeed, in our [analysis](#) just before the election we wondered whether a lack of Republican unity would be the downfall of Trump’s candidacy. Yet these results suggest that the stronger-than-expected Republican unity was not simply about party loyalty. Only 2% of the sample cited party loyalty as motivating their vote choice, and almost all of those respondents supported Hillary Clinton. Trump supporters were far more likely to cite the makeup of the Supreme Court as the deciding factor.

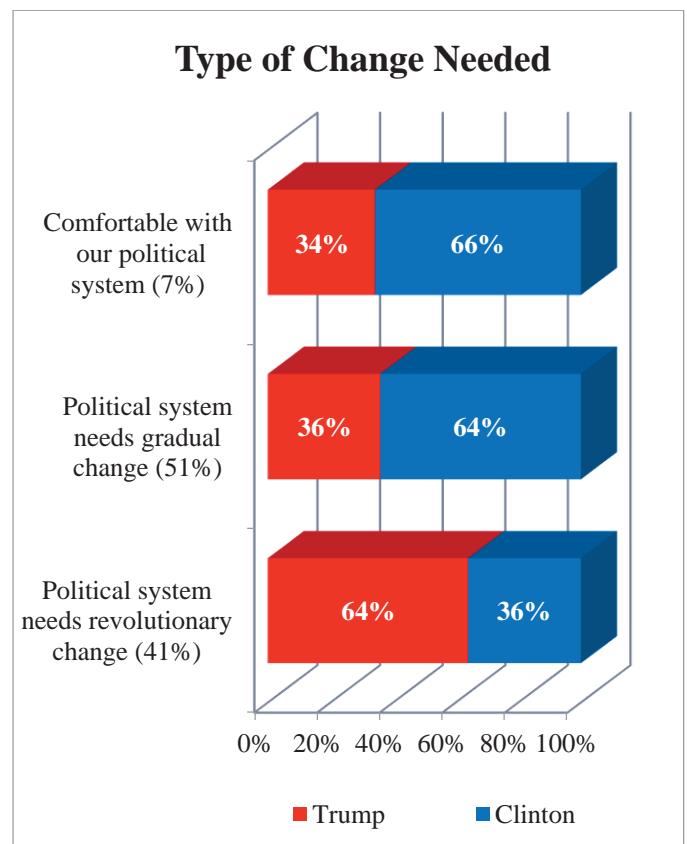
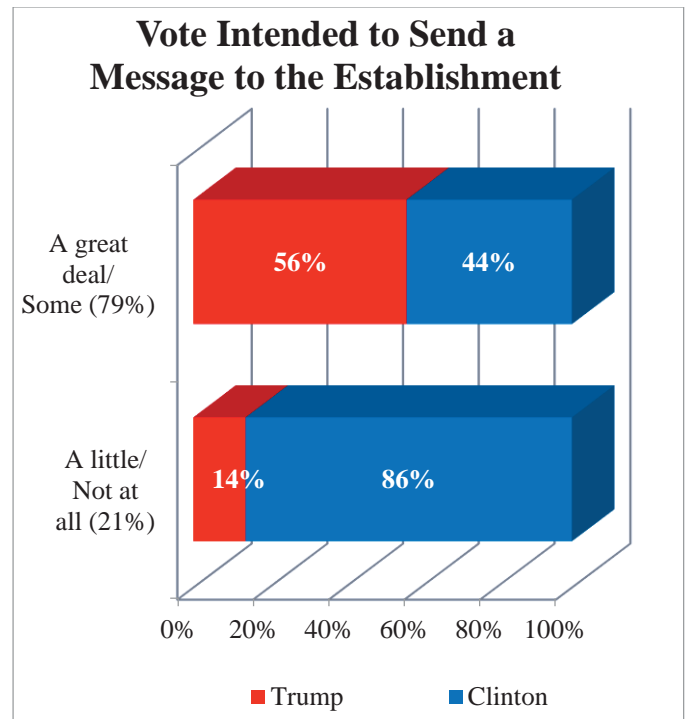


While genuine agreement with the policies of the two candidates was the most-cited rationale for vote choice, Trump's support was driven more by anger with the status quo and the perception that piecemeal changes would not be able to fix the problems in Washington.

In our pre-election [survey](#), we found that Americans were generally unhappy with the federal government and [wanted change](#). Consistent with those findings, we see after the election that the vast majority of Americans wanted to send a message to the political establishment with their vote. While Donald Trump held an advantage among those anti-establishment voters, what is particularly striking is the degree to which Clinton voters also wanted to express their disappointment with the governing body in Washington.

Ultimately, however, what differentiated Trump supporters from Clinton supporters was the type of change they were looking for. Donald Trump ran an insurgency campaign, attacking Democrats in Washington but also the establishment Republicans in the primaries. His support came largely from those who wanted to bring "revolutionary change" to politics rather than change brought about from working within the system.

Hillary Clinton's base of support, on the other hand, came largely from those who felt change was needed, but that any change should be gradual. She was further bolstered by those who believed that no change was necessary at all. Among those who wanted no change or only gradual change, Clinton won by a nearly 2-to-1 margin. Among those favoring revolutionary change, that margin is reversed in Donald Trump's favor.





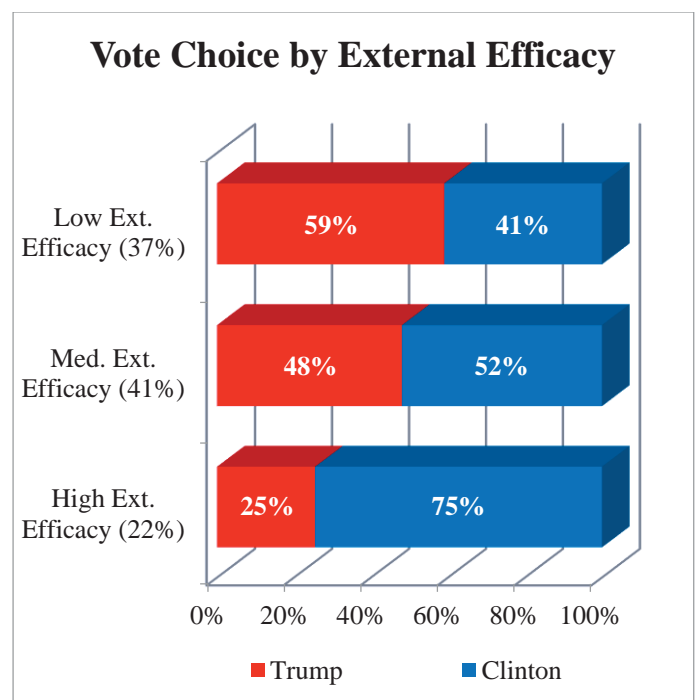
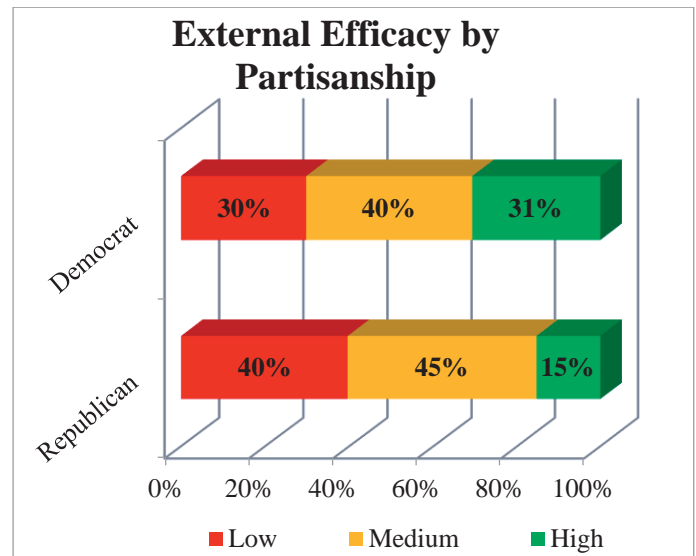
## *Assessing the partisan divide: Republicans lower in external efficacy, trust economic and security institutions more, the media less*

The data from the Critical Issues poll reflects a deep divide between Clinton and Trump supporters. This divide appears to be largely based on whether they believe the government is hearing them. As we noted prior to the election, the majority of Americans viewed the country's political system to be [“rigged”](#) against people like them.

The perception that American politics is rigged such that it benefits only a few privileged people is felt on both sides of the political spectrum. Despite holding very different political views, both Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump used this argument to great effect throughout the 2016 election, yet ultimately Republicans exhibited higher levels of distrust in public officials.

Looking first at external efficacy and partisanship, we see that 40% of all Republicans were on the low end of the external efficacy scale, which seeks to measure the degree to which individuals believe the government is responsive to the people. Only 15% of Republicans exhibited high levels of external efficacy. Democrats, on the other hand, were evenly split between low and high external efficacy. They were more than twice as likely as Republicans to believe that the government would respond to public demand.

This partisan divide on trust in public officials translated directly into different voting behavior. Donald Trump resoundingly won the 37% of voters who scored low in external efficacy, while Hillary Clinton won the 22% of those who scored high by a nearly 3-to-1 margin. Those who were somewhere in the middle were evenly split between the two candidates, explaining the tight election result and the struggle to win over the median voter.



\*External efficacy is measured by combining two survey items gauging agreement with the statements: “People like me don’t have any say about what government does” and “I don’t think public officials care much what people like me think.”

Despite our finding that Democrats and Republicans exhibited very different levels of external efficacy, our results reveal surprisingly similar levels of trust in particular government institutions.

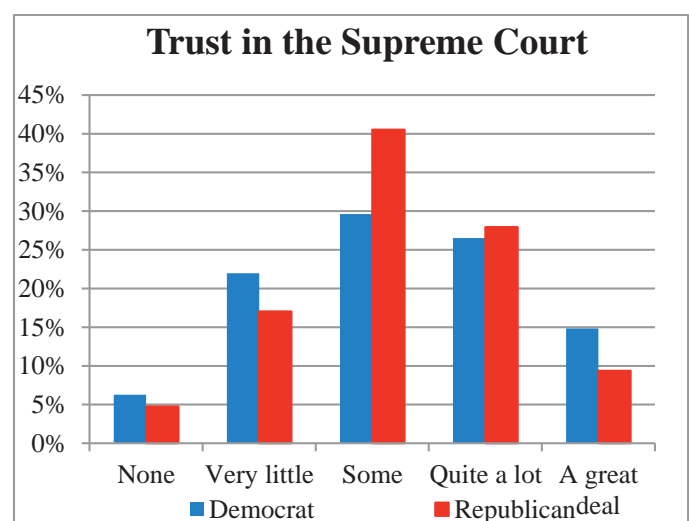
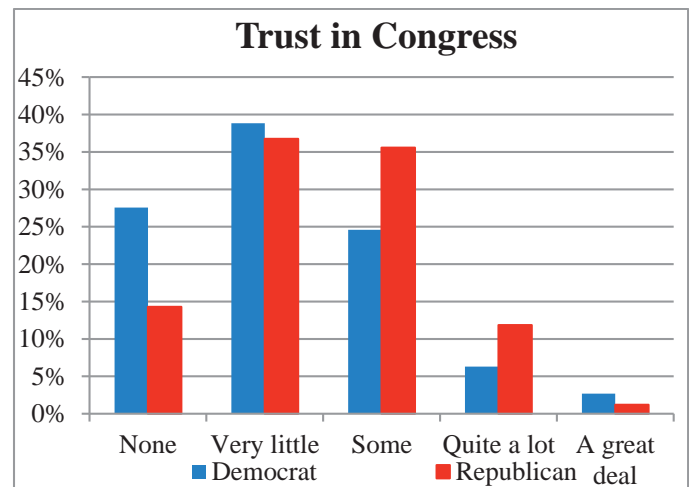
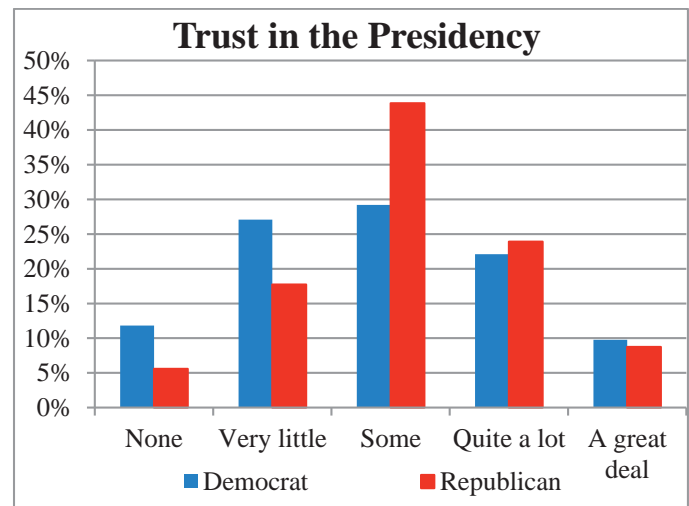
The figures on the right represent the distribution of responses to questions of the level of confidence individuals have in the critical democratic institutions representing our three branches of government: The presidency, Congress, and the Supreme Court.

In each of the three figures, the distribution of confidence in government institutions is remarkably similar between Democrats and Republicans. Americans are relatively more confident in the ability of the president and the Supreme Court to do their jobs when compared to Congress. The most common view among both Democrats and Republicans is to have “very little confidence” in the ability of Congress, which is in keeping with the 19% approval rating Americans give Congress, according to Gallup.

Yet while Americans appear to trust the presidency and the Supreme Court to a greater degree than they trust Congress, overall levels of confidence are still low in absolute terms. Even for the Supreme Court, the most trusted of the three government institutions, fewer than 12% of the respondents in our sample said they had “a great deal” of confidence.

With the recent signing of a controversial executive order that effectively banned immigration from seven Muslim-majority countries and Trump’s recent nomination of Neil Gorsuch to the Supreme Court, it will be interesting to see if Democrats and Republicans continue to have similar attitudes toward these government institutions.

## Trust in Government Institutions





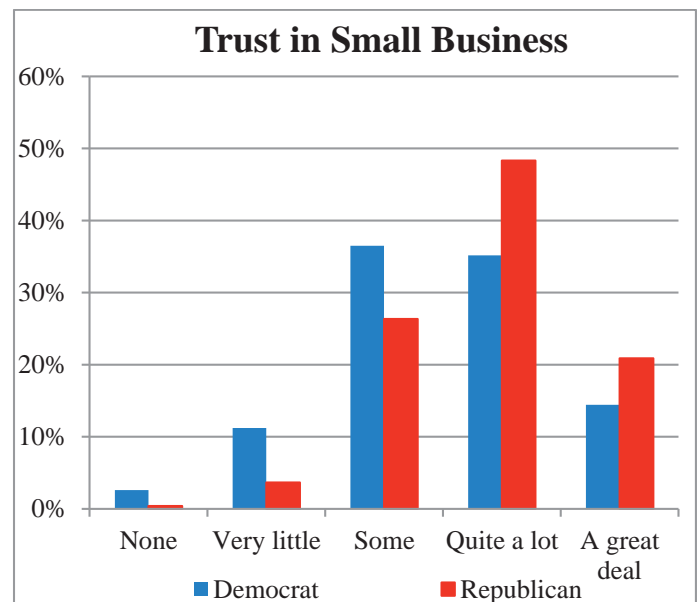
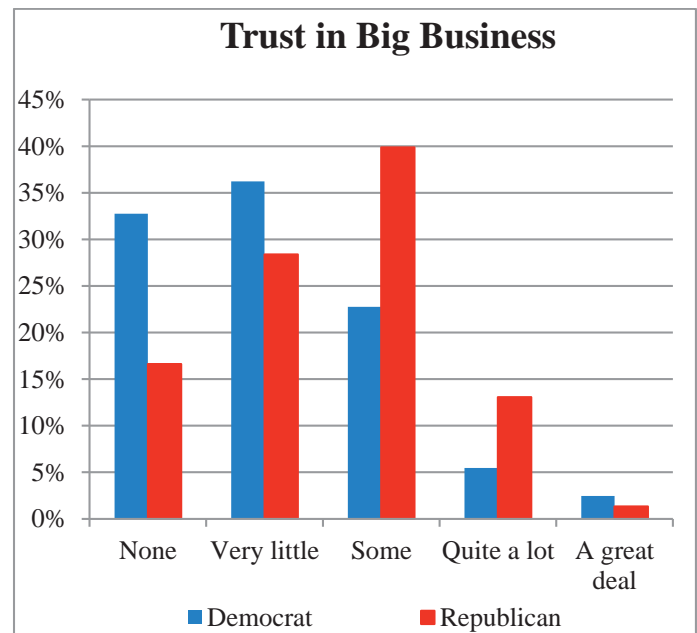
While partisans on both sides of the political spectrum are similarly distrustful of government institutions, they exhibit far more diverging attitudes about their confidence in societal institutions. Over the course of the campaign, institutions such as large corporations, America's security apparatus, and the news media, which have no explicit partisan aim, became politicized. This provided partisan voters a reason to view these institutions in a positive or negative light.

Perceptions of big business are one such example. For Democrats, Bernie Sanders' support in the primary stemmed from the view that the system was rigged and that corporations were responsible. In [2012](#), Senate Candidate and prominent Democrat Elizabeth Warren argued that the system was, indeed, rigged by "oil companies" and "billionaires" looking to save money while destroying jobs. Trump, on the other hand, claimed his experience as a real estate magnate made him uniquely qualified to be president. Findings from the Critical Issues Poll suggest that Democrats were far more likely to lack confidence in big business, while Republicans said they had some confidence in those institutions.

Yet even when looking at small business, the gap in confidence between Democrats and Republicans persists. Small business is universally more trusted than large corporations, yet Democrats largely claimed that they had only some confidence in small businesses, while Republicans were more likely to claim to have quite a lot of confidence.

Ultimately, these results suggest that Donald Trump and his Republican allies in Congress will be able to pursue an agenda that is friendly to big business and small business alike without fear of facing backlash from the base of the Republican Party. Trump's first actions as president reflected this reality, as he [picked](#) Goldman Sachs alumnus and hedge fund CEO Steven Mnuchin as his nominee for Treasury Secretary and unveiled a tax cut that would [dramatically](#) reduce the tax burden on high-income earners.

## Trust in Business Institutions



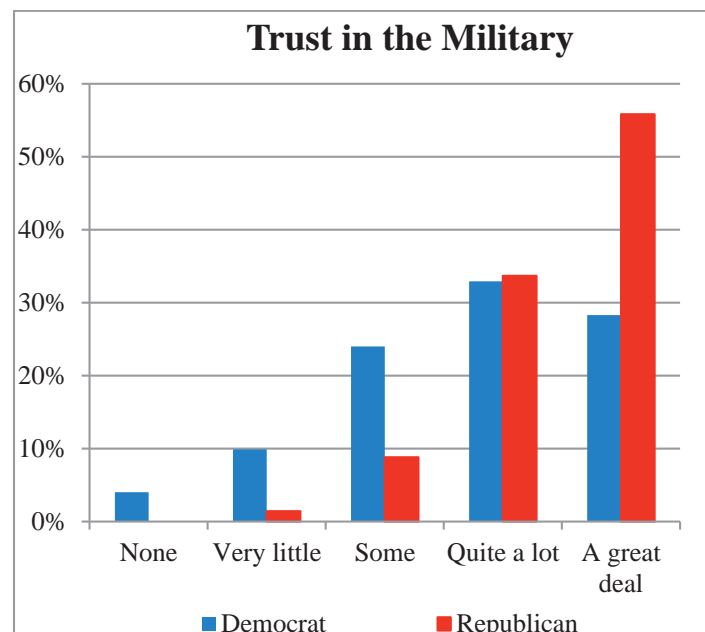
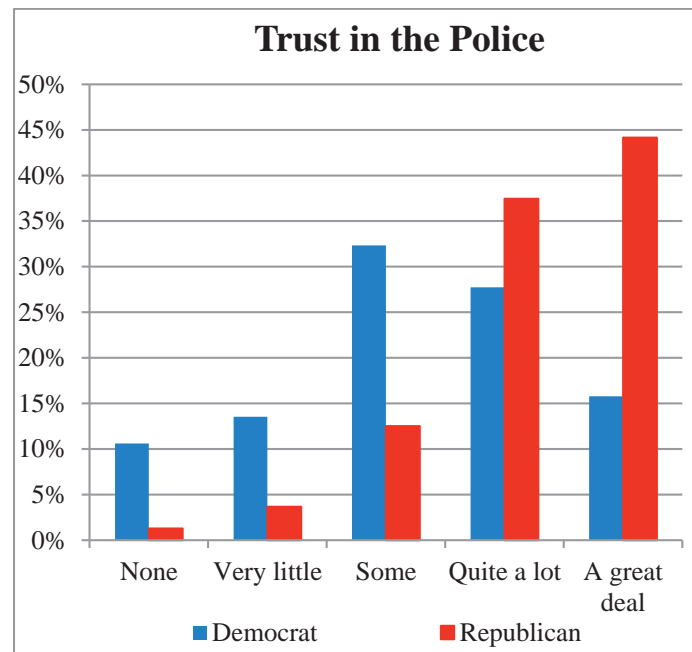
Garnering headlines throughout much of 2016 was the use of lethal police force against African Americans and the Black Lives Matter movement that came from it. The movement was the target of much criticism from conservatives, with Donald Trump going so far as to argue that the movement had directly led to the death of police officers.

In our pre-election poll, we noted that Republicans and Democrats were strongly divided on their perceptions of Black Lives Matter, with more than 90% of Republicans viewing it unfavorably and roughly 70% of Democrats viewing it favorably.

Results from the post-election poll suggest that much of this difference comes down to how much confidence Americans have in the institutions entrusted to protect us. Generally speaking, both Democrats and Republicans say they have strong confidence in the police and the military, with only a small minority claiming to have no or very little confidence in either group.

Despite the high levels of trust Americans have in both institutions, there are strong differences between Democrats and Republicans on the issue of trust. Nearly half of all Republicans say they have “a great deal” of confidence in the police, while another 35% claim to have “quite a lot” of confidence. More Democrats, however, claimed to have “some” confidence in the police and very few claimed they had a lot of confidence, likely reflecting the degree to which they support the Black Lives Matter movement in the wake of recent police killings.

## Trust in Security Institutions

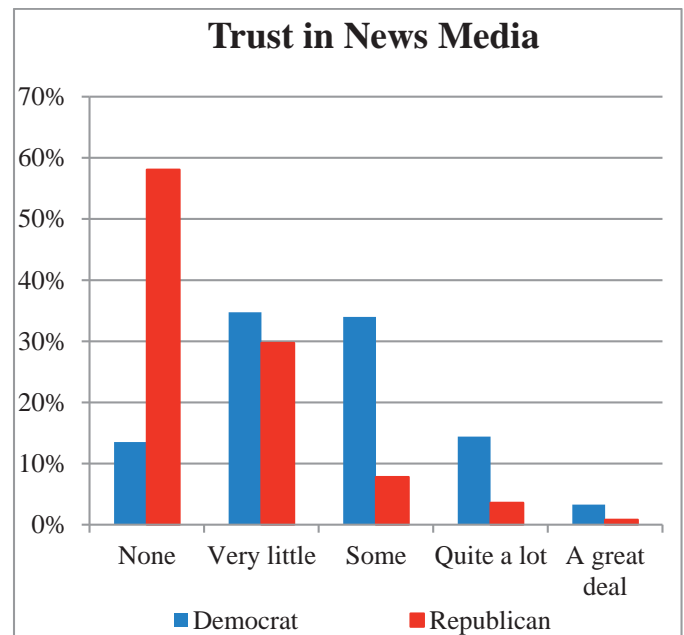


Yet the partisan discrepancy between Democrats and Republicans on the issue of trust in the police is not simply about salient news events such as Black Lives Matter rallies and high-profile police brutality cases. Democrats exhibit a higher level of trepidation when it comes to trust in security institutions, as evidenced by the propensity of Republicans to say they trust the armed forces a great deal (58%), whereas Democrats were only half as likely to say the same.

In the 2016 election, perhaps no political institution was pilloried more than the mainstream media. In the aftermath of the Trump victory, many argued that “[fake news](#)” seen through Facebook and other social media platforms was to blame for the degree to which Americans believed disinformation campaigns aimed at helping Trump’s candidacy.

Yet the fake news phenomenon owes a great deal to the degree to which many Americans do not trust the mainstream media to report impartially and accurately. Donald Trump repeatedly [referred](#) to the “failing New York Times” and called the media “totally dishonest.” In the aftermath of his inauguration, Trump [labeled](#) CNN “fake news” in an apparent attempt to reappropriate the term to describe the approach taken by mainstream media outlets critical of his administration.

## Trust in the News Media



According to results from the Critical Issues Poll, Democrats and Republicans are split in their perception of the media, though neither side is altogether confident in its ability to keep America well informed. Roughly two-thirds of Democrats said they had some or only a little confidence in the news media, yet Republicans were overwhelmingly more negative, with nearly 60% of them claiming they had no confidence in the media whatsoever. These results suggest that Donald Trump can keep the base of his party happy so long as he maintains an adversarial relationship with the press.

## Persisting Critical Issues

### *Additional Findings and Recent Publications from the Critical Issues Poll Series*

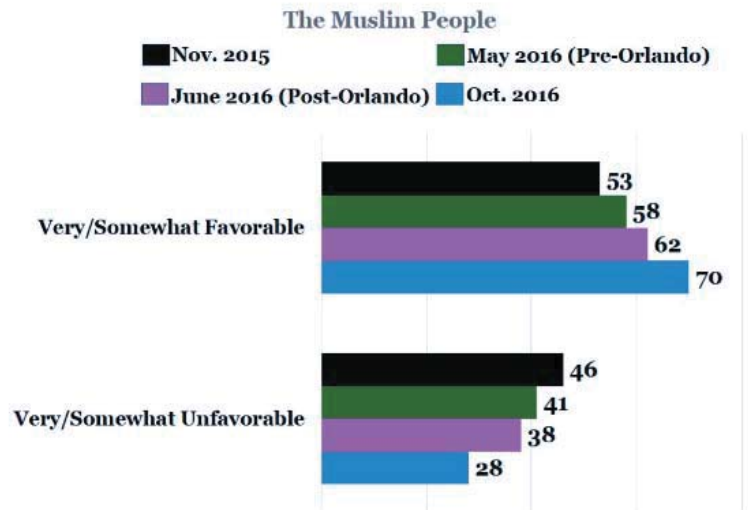
From “[The Monkey Cage](#)” blog at *The Washington Post*: “How Trump changed Americans’ view of Islam – for the better” – by Shibley Telhami

Shibley Telhami, writing in *The Washington Post*, noted that, counter to the popular belief about American opinion toward Muslims in the Trump era, we actually see that Americans increasingly view Muslims favorably. In the first Critical Issues Poll, conducted just before the 2016 general election, a large majority of survey respondents (70%) viewed Muslim people either very or somewhat favorably. This represents a significant shift from the previous year, when only 53% viewed Muslim people favorably.

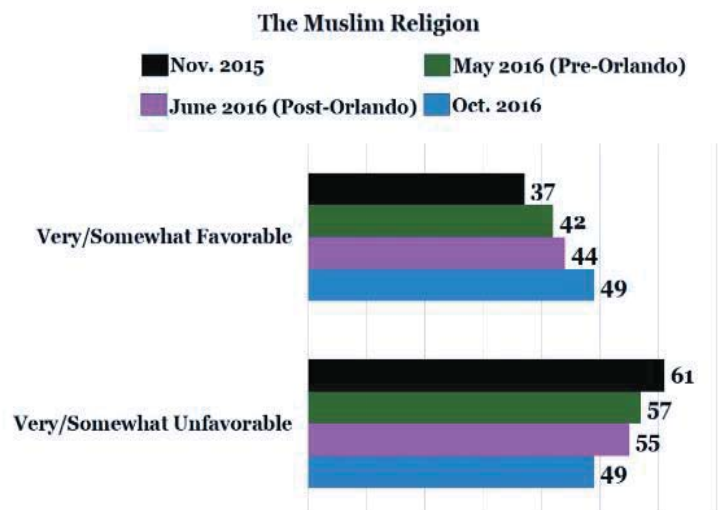
Perceptions of the Muslim religion, however, remained evenly divided, though the data reveal a strong trend toward more favorable attitudes. Whereas a November 2015 poll showed most Americans viewed the religion unfavorably, by October 2016 Americans were evenly split 49%-49%.

As Telhami notes, this shift is largely reflective of a split along partisan lines. “One hint comes from the partisan divide on these issues. Almost all the shifts came from Democrats and independents, not Republicans. Among Democrats, the shift was significant enough to impact overall results. Favorable attitudes toward Muslims improved from 67 percent to 81 percent. Favorable attitudes toward Islam went from 51 percent to 66 percent.”

What is your attitude about each of the following?



What is your attitude about each of the following?



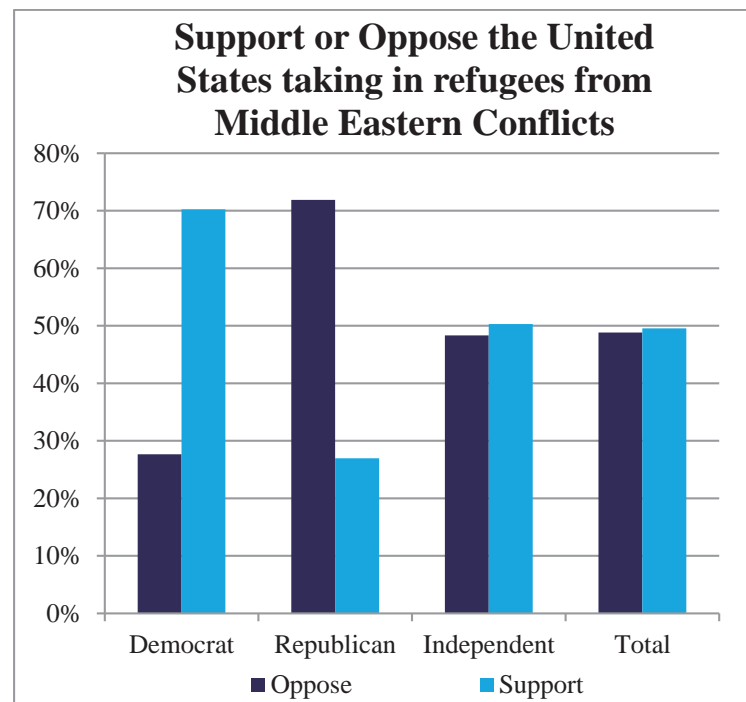
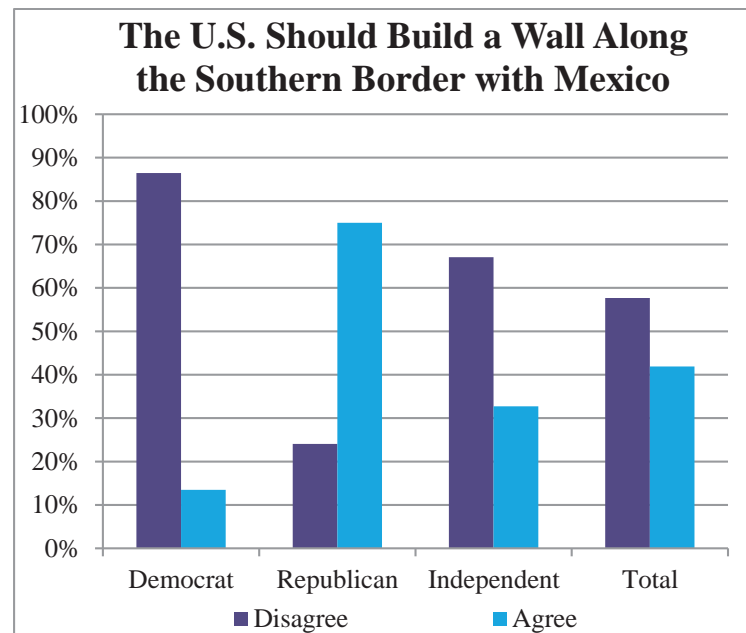
In addition to examining American attitudes toward Muslims, we sought to study whether some of the centerpieces of Donald Trump's foreign policies had a broad base of support.

We first find that a strong majority of Americans do not favor building a wall along the United States' southern border with Mexico, yet the story is somewhat more complicated when we look at it by partisanship. Donald Trump's claim that Mexico would pay for the wall [came under fire](#) in the first few weeks of his presidency, and the Critical Issues Poll suggests that nearly 60 percent of Americans do not want the wall. Despite this, three-quarters of Republicans claim they do believe a wall should be built, with most of the opposition against the wall coming from Democrats and independents. This suggests Trump will continue to feel pressure in the future from his electoral base to make good on his promise to construct the wall.

With a Trump executive order effectively [banning immigration from seven Muslim-majority countries](#), we find a deeply divided nation on the issue of accepting individuals from the Middle East. Americans are evenly split between those who believe we should accept refugees from Middle Eastern conflicts and those who do not, with partisanship as a major reason for that split.

Important to note, however, is that this edition of the Critical Issues Poll interviewed respondents prior to Trump's inauguration and subsequent executive orders. As the issues receive more attention in the media, opinions on these topics are likely to change.

## Preferences on President Trump's National Security Priorities

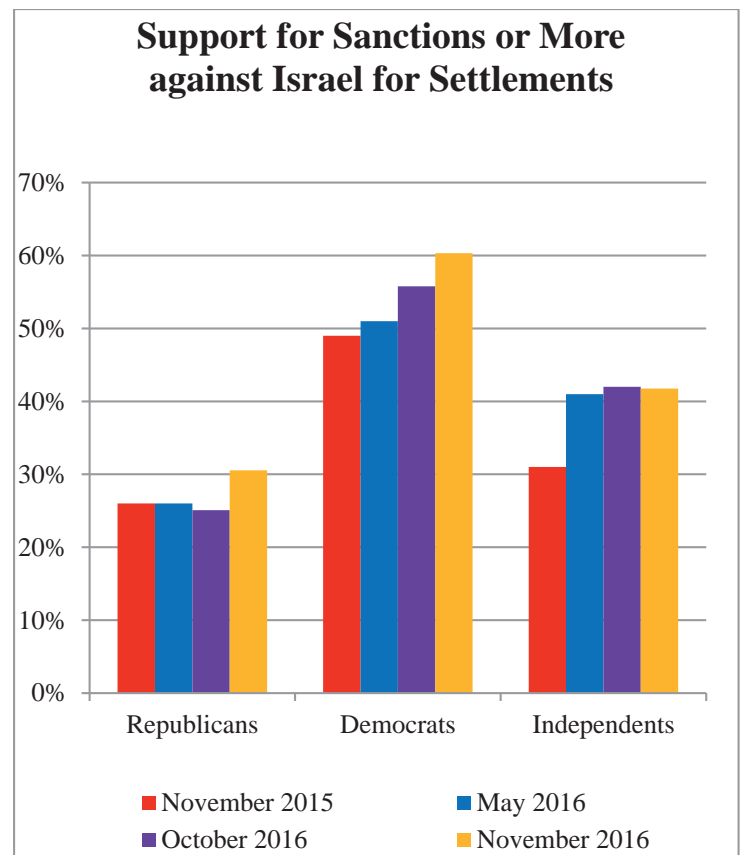


Despite Donald Trump recently telling Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to “[hold back](#),” recent news reports suggest that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu believes President Trump will be more accommodating of Israeli settlements in the West Bank than President Obama was.

The differing policies of President Trump and President Obama appear to have had an effect in shifting public sentiment on those settlements. The Critical Issues Poll, along with [previous polls](#) from the Sadat Chair, reflects that Democrats have become far more critical of Israeli settlements over the past year. While less than a majority of Democrats in a November 2015 poll said they supported sanctions or more severe actions against Israel in response to the building of settlements, that support grew to more than 60% by the end of 2016.

Republicans and independents, however, remained relatively supportive of the settlements, with the vast majority of them consistently supporting either no action or a verbal reprimand for the settlements.

## Democratic Opposition to Israeli Settlements Grows

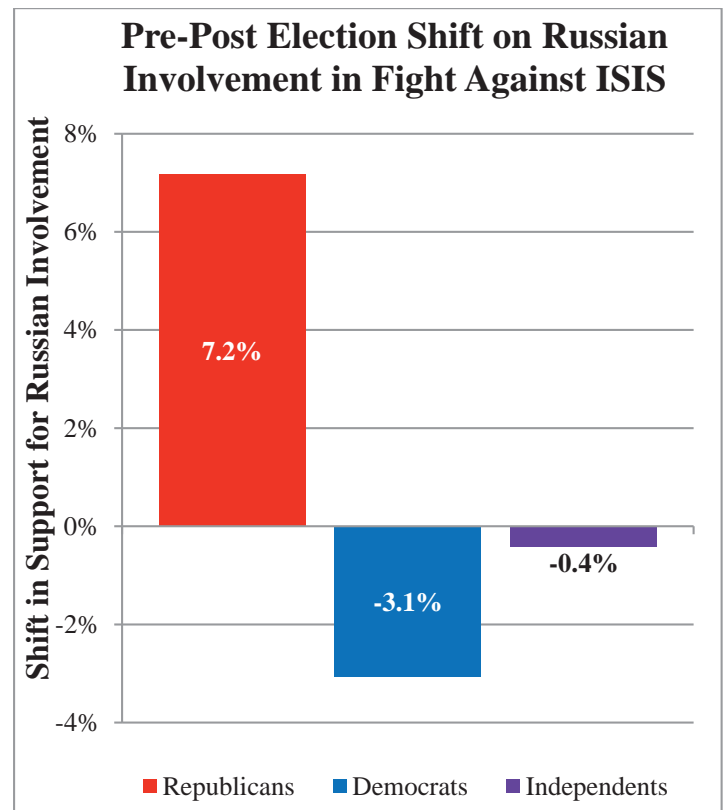




From reports that Russia [hacked](#) the Democratic National Committee in an effort to help Donald Trump's campaign, to the news that Trump's campaign itself was in [contact](#) with Russian intelligence officials, to the recent [resignation](#) of National Security Advisor Michael Flynn over reports he lied about discussing sanctions against Russia with the Russian ambassador, perceptions about the proper relationship for the United States and Russia has become a suddenly partisan issue.

In November, Shibley Telhami [noted](#) in *The Washington Post* that the results from the October 2016 Critical Issues Poll showed steep differences between Democrats and Republicans on the issue of Russia. Democrats were far more likely than Republicans to name Vladimir Putin as a national or world leader they disliked, though both Democrats and Republicans agreed that they would like to see Russia and the United States cooperate more effectively in the conflict in Syria.

## Partisan Polarization on Russia



In the short one-month period between the pre-election and post-election editions of the Critical Issues Poll, we find the attitudes of partisans regarding the proper level of cooperation between the two countries highly polarized. In both surveys, we asked respondents whether it was important in the fight against ISIS to put aside our differences and ally with the Russians to accomplish the mutual goal of defeating the Islamic State.

In the pre-election survey, just over half of Democrats and two-thirds of Republicans said ISIS was enough of a threat that it was necessary for the United States to work with Russia rather than with allies alone. These numbers reveal an already 14 percentage point partisan gap on the question of cooperation with Russia. Merely one month later, that gap grew to greater than 24 percentage points, as Republicans became 7 points more likely to want cooperation with Russia while Democrats became 3 percentage points less likely. Importantly, these numbers reflect American attitudes on cooperation with Russia before Michael Flynn's resignation and before news outlets confirmed that Trump campaign staffers had, in fact, been in touch with Russian intelligence throughout the 2016 campaign. We suspect responses to these sorts of questions will be highly volatile in the months and years to come.

## Methodology

The survey was conducted November 18-23, 2016 with a panel consisting of a probability-based representative sample. The panel was recruited by Nielsen Scarborough from its larger probability-based national panel, which was recruited by mail and telephone using a random sample of households provided by Survey Sampling International. A total of 1,042 panelists completed the survey. Responses were weighted by age, gender, income, education, race, and geographic region using benchmarks from the US Census. The survey was also weighted by partisan identification. The margin of error is 3.04%

Note: These questions were fielded as part of a larger poll on foreign and domestic issues. Participants in this study were provided by Nielsen from Nielsen's sample of respondents

For more information, please visit [criticalissues.umd.edu](http://criticalissues.umd.edu)