

American Politics, Race, and Foreign Policy

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**A survey sponsored by
University of Maryland Critical Issues Poll
fielded by Nielsen Scarborough**

Survey Methodology

The survey was conducted October 5-14, 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 1528 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 2.5%

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.

Key Findings

Central Findings on the State of the 2016 Presidential Race

Take Away: While Hillary Clinton held a sizeable lead over Donald Trump, Americans are also looking for a break with the status quo. About two thirds say they strongly agreed or somewhat agreed that “the system is rigged against people like me.” More than half of respondents in our sample see Donald Trump as the more likely agent of change, yet Americans are split on the type of political change they prefer (gradual or revolutionary). And despite their desire for change, the majority of respondents still chose to back Hillary Clinton in the election. With regard to the 2005 Access Hollywood tape, it had a measurable impact on voter attitudes: Although 91% of voters said the tape didn’t change their minds, about 6% said they changed their mind away from potentially voting for Trump—a significant shift so close to Election Day. In addition, Democrats became much stronger supporters of their candidate in the wake of the tape.

Horse Race:

- Hillary Clinton led Donald Trump 43%-34%, with Gary Johnson pulling 6% and Jill Stein pulling an additional 2%. Despite Clinton’s lead, a full 15% of the sample said that none of the candidates were appealing to them.
- Interest in the presidential election is high: 91% of respondents said they were following the election either very closely or somewhat closely. Only 2% claimed they were not following the election at all closely.

What is Motivating Voters?

- 26% of respondents said their vote represented a vote against another candidate. 29% of Democrats said they were motivated to vote against another candidate, compared to 22% among Republicans.
- 78% of respondents said they wanted significant change to the American political system “very much.” Only one percent of respondents claimed to not want change at all.
- 65% of respondents said they believed they agreed with the sentiment that “our system is rigged against people like me.”
- When asked which candidate was more likely to bring significant political change to America, respondents selected Trump over Clinton 52%-31%. On top of this, 73% of voters said they wanted their vote to send a message to the political establishment “a great deal.”

Can Donald Trump Ride the Antiestablishment Wave to the White House?

- While Donald Trump is seen as the candidate of change this election, 44% of respondents said he would bring change for the worse. In contrast, only 24% said he would bring profound change for the better.
- Voters do not consider either candidate trustworthy, but this is especially problematic for Donald Trump. 55% of all respondents, including 88% of Democrats, said that Donald Trump was not at all trustworthy. For Hillary Clinton, 50% of all respondents, including 90% of Republicans, said that she was not at all trustworthy.
- Americans suspect that some Trump supporters do not want to express support for their candidate publicly. 87% of all respondents agreed with the statement, “there are Americans who will vote for Donald Trump in the presidential election even though they are not prepared to state that openly.”

Did the Access Hollywood Tape Hurt Trump’s Candidacy

- 52% of respondents said they disapproved of the way Donald Trump handled the controversy surrounding the 2005 Access Hollywood video tape where Trump can be heard discussing his behavior around women. In contrast, only 21% said they approved. Responses differed sharply by partisanship, with only 26% of Republicans claiming they disapproved of Trump’s handling of the controversy, while 79% of Democrats disapproved.
- Respondents tended to not believe Trump’s claim that his comments were just “locker room talk.” Only 23% said his comments were locker room talk, while 45% said they represented exactly who he is. The split was especially strong among partisans, with only 42% of Republicans claiming this was locker room talk, while 79% of Democrats said the comments were exactly who he is.
- Similarly, partisans were split over whether it was acceptable for Donald Trump to bring up Bill Clinton’s history of sexual misconduct. While 39% claimed it was not at all relevant to the campaign, 65% of Democrats claimed it was not relevant while only 11% of Republicans said the same.
- Trump’s comments in the leaked video tape do not appear to have changed many minds in the election. 91% of respondents said it would not change their vote. Only 1% said they had supported Trump but would now support a different candidate. 4% of respondents said they were undecided but would now vote for someone else, while an additional 2% said they previously supported Trump but are now undecided.
- Among those whose choice for candidate didn’t change because of the tape, the biggest effect of the video appeared to be in rallying Democrats to support Hillary Clinton. 47% of Democrats claimed that the strength of their support for their candidate had increased while only 16% of Republicans claimed the same.

Central Findings on Race Relations in the United States

Take Away: Americans hold mixed views on the state of race relations in the country. While most Americans agree that race relations are bad, a majority of Americans holds a negative view of the Black Lives Matter movement. Furthermore, Americans are split along partisan lines as to which presidential candidate can better heal the divide in the country.

How do Americans View the Black Lives Matter Movement?

- 60% of respondents said they had an unfavorable impression of the Black Lives Matter movement, including 38% who said they had a strongly unfavorable impression. By contrast, only 15% said they had a strongly favorable impression.
- Republicans viewed the Black Lives Matter movement particularly unfavorably, with 92% of Republicans saying they had an unfavorable impression. 69% of Democrats, by contrast, had a largely favorable view of the movement.

Who Can Heal the Racial Divide?

- Across partisanship, Americans see race relations between blacks and whites in the United States as bad. 64% of Republicans and 69% of Democrats view race relations as bad in the country.
- While partisans agree that race relations are bad in America, they differ in which presidential candidate is best equipped to bring the country back together. Hillary Clinton leads Donald Trump 34%-26%, yet among Republicans Trump leads Clinton 53%-4%, and among Democrats Clinton leads Trump 64%-3%.

Central Findings on Gender and the Presidential Election

Take Away: Americans do not believe Hillary Clinton's gender will hurt her chances of being elected. More people believe being a woman will help than hurt, and a majority of respondents would prefer if the media focused less on sexism in the presidential race.

How has Hillary Clinton's Gender Changed the Election?

- More Americans think Hillary Clinton's gender will help her in the election (36%) than hurt her (16%).
- Clinton is perceived as being better for advancing the interests of women. 32% of respondents said she would advance those interests greatly, compared to only 10% for Donald Trump. For Trump, a majority of respondents (51%) said he would not advance the interests of women at all.

Is the Media Focusing on Gender Too Much?

- Overwhelmingly, Americans see the media as reporting too much on sexism in the 2016 election. 54% said the coverage was too much, while only 17% said there was not enough coverage. Democrats are evenly split 30%-30% on this, while Republicans overwhelmingly believe sexism receives too much coverage, at a 79%-4% split.

Central Findings on ISIS and Syria

Take Away: While Americans, especially Democrats dislike Russian President Vladimir Putin, they believe that the United States government should put aside its differences with Russia and work more closely with it in order to defeat ISIS, which they see as the top American global priority. They do not, however, support the large scale deployment of ground troops in Iraq and Syria to fight ISIS.

Should the United States be More Engaged in Syria?

- Americans are evenly split on whether the United States should do more with regard to Syria. 42% of respondents said there should be more U.S. military involvement in Syria, while 34% believe there should be less.
- Americans largely agree that the goal of the U.S. military in Syria should be defeating ISIS. More than 52% believe defeating ISIS and its allies should be the primary objective, while only 2 percent said removing the government of Bashar Assad should be the top priority.

Should the United States work with Russia to Defeat ISIS?

- 60% of respondents said that it was important to put aside our differences with Russia in order to fight ISIS, compared to only 36% who believed we should fight ISIS with allies only. 67% of Republicans favored working with Russia, compared to 53% of Democrats.
- 67% of respondents said that the level of Russian-American cooperation over the conflict in Syria was less than they would like to see.

Is the Fight Against ISIS Worth Risking American Soldiers?

- Americans are evenly split over whether ISIS was such an existential threat that it warranted a huge investment in lives. 52% said it was not worth the investment, while 46% said it was worth the investment. Democrats overwhelmingly said it was not worth risking American lives (65%) while Republicans said it was worth the cost (60%).
- 35% of respondents supported the deployment of a large American ground force in Syria and Iraq to fight ISIS. 63% of respondents opposed such a move.

Central Findings on Attitudes toward Muslims

Take Away: While Americans have generally positive attitudes toward the Muslim people, they are evenly split over how they view the Muslim faith. Furthermore, there is a strong partisan split, with Democrats generally viewing Islam more favorably than Republicans. What is striking however is that this poll showed continued, progressive favorable change in attitudes toward both Islam and Muslims, reinforcing the findings of three other University of Maryland (Sadat Chair) polls over the past election year.

How favorably do Americans view the Muslim People?

- Americans overwhelmingly view Muslim people favorably, but there is a strong partisan divide in perceptions. 70% say they have either a very or somewhat favorable view of Muslim people, but this number goes up to 81% among Democrats and down to 57% among Republicans.

How favorably do Americans view the Muslim Religion?

- Americans are evenly split over how they view the Muslim faith. 49% of respondents have a favorable view of the Muslim religion, while another 49% have an unfavorable view. Among Democrats favorability is at 66% and among Republicans favorability is only at 29%.