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McClatchy-Marist Poll*

Trump in Transition: Halftime Score

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This McClatchy-Marist Poll Reports:

At the midpoint of his transition, President-elect Donald Trump faces a nation rife with dissatisfaction of its direction and pronounced partisan and racial divisions. Nearly half of voters nationally express approval in how Trump has been carrying out his transition, and a plurality of voters nationally say they think President-elect Trump is taking the country in a better direction. But, Americans have reservations about whether or not he can unite the country and believe it is more divided than it was before Election Day. The president-elect has also not calmed Americans' concerns about his temperament raised during the contentious campaign, and a plurality describe him as less ethical than other public officeholders in Washington, D.C.

While majorities of voters have confidence in Trump to grow the economy and to keep America safe, they lack faith in his ability to effectively manage many other key tenets of the presidency such as handling foreign policy, representing all Americans, and appointing the best people. He receives mixed reviews on his ability to lead the country.

The political polarization which existed on Election Day has not eased. Perception of the president-elect and his support is divided along partisan and racial lines. The only area of consensus is not a positive. Regardless of party identification or race, at least a majority asserts the nation is moving in the wrong direction.

"After a rough and tumble election year where the unpredictable was the predictable, Trump's transition to the presidency is lacking a political honeymoon," says Dr. Lee M. Miringoff, Director of The Marist College Institute for Public Opinion. "The president-elect has been reaching out to his base but has not broadened his support."

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A plurality of voters, 44%, say Trump is changing the nation for the better. 34% say the change he is bringing about is for the worse, and 17% do not think the president-elect is creating any real change. Four percent are unsure. President-elect Trump is underperforming, then, President-elect Obama in 2008. At that time, 55% considered Mr. Obama to be moving the country in a better direction. 10% thought he was changing the nation for the worse, and 24% reported he was not having any effect on the country. 11%, at that time, were unsure.

Republicans, 85%, are overwhelmingly more likely than Democrats, 12%, to consider Trump to be effecting positive change. In contrast, nearly two in three Democrats, 64%, believe Trump is initiating the wrong type of change. One in five Democrats, 20%, do not think the president-elect is creating any kind of change. Among independents, a plurality, 42%, report Trump is changing the country for the better. 29% say the change he is bringing about is for the worse, and 22% think he is not effecting any real change.

A racial divide exists. More than half of white voters, 51%, say President-elect Trump is generating positive change while half of African American voters, 50%, believe he is fostering negative change. Latino voters divide. 39% think the president-elect is moving the nation in a better direction, 40% say he is guiding it in a wrong one, and 19% assert he is not changing the nation at all.

When looking at the job performance of President-elect Trump during the transition, nearly half of registered voters nationally, 49%, say they approve. 42% disapprove, and 9% are unsure. Although Trump's rating is more positive than negative, voters are less satisfied with how he is performing during the transition process than when President Obama transitioned to the office. In December 2008, more than six in ten registered voters, 63%, thought well of his actions, and 10% disapproved. 27%, at that time, were unsure.

Not surprisingly, a partisan divide exists. Most Republicans, 88%, approve of how President-elect Trump is performing during the transition while nearly three in four Democrats, 73%, do not. Of note, 18% of Democrats say they approve of how Trump is doing. Among independents, a plurality, 46%, approve of how Trump is tackling the task of assembling his administration and preparing to take office. 41% disapprove, and 13% are unsure.

Differences also exist along racial lines. While nearly six in ten white voters, 57%, approve of Trump's performance, 65% of African American and 52% of Latino voters disapprove. Regionally, Trump fares better among voters in the Midwest and South where 55% and 53%, respectively, approve of the job he is doing. While voters in the Northeast divide, 47% to 45%, a plurality of those in the West, 49%, disapprove of how Trump is doing during the transition.

More than one in four voters, 28%, report Trump is doing better than they expected him to do during the transition process. 58% think he is doing about as they expected, including 28% who say that is a good thing and 26% who say it is a bad thing. Four percent do not know whether or not it is a good or bad thing. 10% of voters nationally consider Trump to be doing worse than they anticipated, and 4% are unsure.

President-elect Trump transitions into power amid a backdrop of pessimism and the perception that the nation is fractured. And, a majority of American voters are not convinced that Trump will be able to “bind the wounds of division.”

62% of Americans think the country is moving in the wrong direction while 31% consider it to be moving in the right one. Six percent are unsure. This is little changed from just before the election when 59% of adults nationally thought the country was on the wrong track, and 33% said it was on the right track. Eight percent, at that time, were unsure.

“Before Election Day, Democrats and African Americans thought the country was moving in the right direction, and Republicans and whites described the country as on the wrong track,” says Dr. Lee M. Miringoff, Director of The Marist College Institute for Public Opinion. “Now, perceptions are similar regardless of party or race.”

More than seven in ten registered voters nationally, 72%, believe the nation is more divided now than it was before the presidential election. 20% think it is more united, and 8% are unsure. While Democrats, 88%, and independents, 73%, are more likely to perceive a post-election schism, even a majority of Republicans, 54%, have this view.

A majority of registered voters nationally, 53%, believe President-elect Trump will do more to divide the country than to unite it. 43% think Trump is more likely to be a president who unites the nation, and 4% are unsure. A partisan divide is present. Most Republicans, 80%, say Trump will be more likely to bring the country together while most Democrats, 86%, think he will move the populous farther apart. A majority of independents, 53%, view Trump as a divisive presence. Looking at race, 76% of African American and 64% of Latino voters think President-elect Trump will do more to divide the country. White voters divide. 50% say he will be a unifying force while 46% report he will divide the American people.

During the contentious election season, Trump faced criticism about his temperament and whether or not he was fit to be President of the United States. Has President-elect Trump calmed those fears? Nearly six in ten Americans, 57%, do not think he has. 38% say he has alleviated those concerns, and 5% are unsure. Most Democrats, 85%, and nearly six in ten independents, 57%, do not think the president-elect has extinguished the fears about his temperament. While about two-thirds of Republicans, 66%, report Trump has calmed those worries, a notable 29% say those fears still exist. Regardless of race, at least half of adults believe President-elect Trump has not calmed the concerns about his temperament since winning the election.

American voters are not optimistic that President-elect Trump will make the way things are done in Washington, D.C. more honest. 36% of the electorate say the way things are done in the nation's capital will be less ethical. 32% think the processes in D.C. will be more ethical now that Trump has been elected, and 30% do not think there will be any difference in the ethics of D.C. politics. Two percent are unsure.

What about Donald Trump? Do voters think he has higher morals than other Washington officeholders? More than four in ten voters, 42%, describe Trump as less ethical than other elected officials in Washington, D.C. 28% say he is more ethical, and 27% believe his ethics are on par with most public officeholders. Three percent are unsure.

Do American voters have confidence in President-elect Trump to deliver on some of the key components of the Presidency? Majorities of registered voters nationally are very confident or confident in Trump's ability to grow the economy, 59%, and to keep America safe, 54%. However, majorities are either not too confident or not confident at all that Trump will be able to handle foreign policy, 56%, represent all Americans, 56%, and appoint the best people, 52%. They divide, 49% to 50%, about whether or not President-elect Trump will provide good leadership. Partisan and racial differences underscore the results of each of these questions.

Are you very confident, confident, not too confident, or not confident at all in Donald Trump's ability to do each of the following as president:

National Registered Voters

National Registered Voters	Very confident / Confident	Very confident	Confident	Not too confident	Not confident at all	Unsure
Grow the economy	59%	23%	36%	20%	20%	2%
Keep America safe	54%	21%	33%	21%	24%	1%
Provide good leadership	49%	16%	33%	25%	25%	1%
Appoint the best people	47%	16%	31%	23%	29%	1%
Represent all Americans	42%	13%	29%	24%	32%	1%
Handle foreign policy	42%	12%	30%	24%	32%	2%

McClatchy-Marist Poll National Registered Voters December 2016

Candidate Trump ran with an anti-establishment message, but half of voters do not think his administration will be staffed with "outsiders." 50% say Trump will fill his administration with people who are part of the establishment while 42% believe it will include people who are "outsiders." Eight percent are unsure. Although 53% of Republicans say the Trump team will be comprised of those outside the Beltway, even 33% admit his administration will be made up of those who are part of the establishment. About two-thirds of Democrats, 66%, think Trump will appoint D.C. insiders. Independents divide. 48% say President-elect Trump will employ those who are part of the establishment, and 45% report he will mostly include those who are "outsiders."

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Although improved from before his victory, President-elect Trump's popularity remains upside down. 43% of voters have a favorable opinion of Trump while a majority, 52%, has an unfavorable one. Five percent are unsure. In the final McClatchy-Marist Poll before the election, 31% of voters had a positive impression of Trump while 64% had a negative one. Five percent, at that time, were unsure.

When looking at the ideology of President-elect Trump, 31% of voters consider Trump to be too conservative. 14% say he is too liberal, and 45% report he is neither too conservative nor too liberal. 10% are unsure.

In January, both the Executive and Legislative branches of the government in Washington, D.C. will be under Republican control, but more than six in ten Americans, 63%, say they think it is better if the president and the majority who controls Congress are from different political parties. 29% prefer that the two be of the same party, and 8% are unsure. The desire for divided government has grown. When the McClatchy-Marist Poll last reported this question in July 2012, 52% preferred a system whereby the president and congressional majority were from different parties. 40%, at that time, said it was better if the two are from the same party, and 8% were undecided.

Do Americans want government officials to compromise to find solutions or stand on principle even if it means gridlock? Nearly two-thirds of Americans, 65%, report that compromise is essential. 28% put the emphasis on standing on principle even if gridlock ensues, and 7% are unsure. Although these proportions are nearly identical to when the McClatchy-Marist Poll reported this question in July 2013, there has been a slight decline in the proportion of those who cite compromise since 2012. When this question was first asked by McClatchy-Marist in July of that year, 72% of Americans said it was more important to compromise rather than stand on principle, 24%. The proportion of Americans with that view reached its height in December 2012 when 74% of Americans prioritized compromise over taking a principled stand.

Americans perceive a disconnect between the public and elected officials, but that division is shrinking. Nearly three in four residents nationally, 73%, think those who are in positions to make decisions for the country see things differently than the public does. 22% believe elected officials and the public are on the same page, and 4% are unsure. When McClatchy-Marist reported this question in July 2012, 85% of U.S. residents thought elected officials were out of touch with their constituents, and only 12% thought the two saw eye-to-eye. Three percent, at that time, were unsure.